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Franciscan Italy

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FRANCISCAN ITALY

ST. FRANCIS, AFTER CIMABUE

(from the Lower Church of St. Francesco, Assisi)

FRANCISCAN ITALY

BY

HAROLD ELSDALE GOAD

WITH 27 ILLUSTRATIONS
AND 2 MAPS

271.3
G53

NEW YORK
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PREFACE

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APART from enthusiasm, my chief excuse for adding to the already superabundant literature upon St. Francis of Assisi is exceptional opportunity during the last five and twenty years of knowing Franciscan country and of following the travels of the Saint over mountain and wilderness, generally on foot, and thus of learning a great deal of local legend which does not generally find its way into official biographies.

Of the chief books that have served me as sources of history I have appended a brief bibliography; to their many authors, both living and dead, I am much indebted. For countless points of local information I should like to take this opportunity of recording my gratitude to Prof. Pennacchi, Librarian of the Communal Library of Assisi, and chief friend of all enquirers; to Comm. Avv. Fortini, Mayor of Assisi, whose industry in searching unexplored archives has been rewarded by most remarkable discoveries; to Cav. Dott. Oreste Rossi of the Subasio Hotel, and to Ing. Laurenzio Laurenzi, the well-known artist and engraver of Franciscan landscape. I also desire to thank Cav. Alinari of Florence and Sig. Benvenuti of Assisi for their kind permission to reproduce their photographs for illustration. To these and, above all, to my friend Miss Emily Stephens, who has kindly read my manuscript and made most valuable suggestions, I desire to express my deep sense of obligation.

H. E. G.

July, 1926

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FRANCISCAN ITALY

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Introduction—The Franciscan Province—The Associations of the City of Assisi, and of the Cities and Villages in its View—The Charm of St. Francis.

I

"FRANCISCAN Italy." What is the meaning of this phrase, peculiar, yet precise? Why does it suggest a period and a province? We do not speak of "Benedictine Italy"; yet, no more than the Benedictine, was the Franciscan movement either temporary or provincial. None the less, in some special way we feel that its universal Tree, spreading its branches to the corners of the earth, is rooted in the heart of Umbria and that it blossomed in the springtide of the thirteenth century. No other soil and no other season could have produced a flower so exquisite, whose fragrance, wafted down the centuries, still draws men across the world.

The heart and centre of this "province" is Assisi, a city which in all its history never held more than ten thousand souls. Here was the "Orient," as Dante calls it, and here must be the goal of every Franciscan pilgrim. Into all parts of Umbria the Tree spreads out, and many other cities, villages and isolated convents should be visited; but to Assisi again and again he must return, for hence as from a central trunk each branch begins, whether the blossoms be of art, of poetry, or of sanctity.

This book is neither a guide to Umbria nor a history of St. Francis and his Order; it is rather an endeavour—in "popular" vein—to blend the history and the topography, to show how things were in St. Francis's time, how they are to-day, and, wherever it is possible, how they so came to be. It will try to tell the history geographically, and describe the

scenes, where incidents occurred, in the historical sequence, in order that the memories of the beautiful places may be linked with the beautiful stories told about them. Of both scenes and stories, it is obvious that it can make no more than a small selection, but the book may serve perhaps to prepare the pilgrim's mind for that which he is to see, or to refresh remembrance of scenes he has enjoyed, while affording a general framework for the whole.

For, whether one may hold it as a special act of Providence or as an accident of history, few will deny the subtle correspondence between the spirit of St. Francis's life and the aspect of the land. Never was scenery or circumstance more exquisitely fitted to enhance the beauty of a symbolic drama than the natural magic of the Umbrian landscape to the episodes of the Franciscan tale.

But Beauty, one is often told, is but a mode of vision. Naturally men's vision both of Umbria and of Francis has changed in the course of seven centuries, and controversies have sprung up owing to the neglect of this essential fact. It is always difficult to discount sufficiently the prejudice of perspective. There are many saints in the great Calendar for whom perspective counts for nothing, since they are, for the modern world at least, mere decorative figures without place or period, dwellers in tapestry and painted window, whose legends would most fittingly begin, "Once upon a time." But St. Francis, his period and his province are one picture; he cannot well be understood without them. He stands on solid earth, being himself so living and so human that he makes his background real and natural like himself. Wherever he moves through the mediæval world, the strange flat scene gains depth and roundness and the lay-figures come to life. This is the meaning of "Franciscan Italy."

II

Manifold are the shrines in every language erected to hold diverse portraits of the Poverello, from the lives of Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure or the glorious canto in Dante's Paradise, down to the somewhat arid and often controversial edifices of modern scholarship. This book will endeavour to elude the sharpest points of controversy; its authorities will be the old ones, its opinions the traditional. After all, it matters less what we think of Francis than what the world

has dreamed of him for seven hundred years. It is that portrait which has given life to thousands of spirits in past ages and inspired the art and poetry by which they live to-day.

We hold it for an axiom that mistakes, misdeeds and differences usually tend to be over-emphasized, owing to the innate propensity of men to tell malicious tales. It follows, therefore, that in every controversy the more charitable opinion is more likely to be the true one; and this is certainly the case in the Franciscan question, where mountains of reproach have been piled up on every molehill of misunderstanding. But it is faith, not conflict, that is the vehicle of inspiration; wherefore we are not concerned with theories as to what St. Francis aimed at, tried to do and failed to do, according to some interpreters, but with all that he actually inspired. When conflicts become manifest, we will set forth each side plainly, showing how each branch grew out of the single root, though bearing separately divers fruits and flowers. Differences betwixt authorities will be explained in their due places as the growth of the various legends is related.

As for the miracles—the dreams, the visions, the prophecies and healings, the water turned to wine, the springs that gushed forth in arid places, the constant obedience of elements, animals and birds, towards these too there can only be one attitude—that of an intelligent contemporary. If we are to enter into the world of the thirteenth century, we must take our surroundings as we find them there, just as we have to take those of our world to-day. There is nothing more irrational than to project the rationalism of the nineteenth century into the historical picture of an age that knew it not. How is it possible to write history at all, if we begin by asserting intellectual prejudices that must impugn the veracity of all authorities, whose only claim to our regard is that they wrote things down as they believed them to have happened? There is nothing more presumptuous on the part of an historian than to thrust his own beliefs or disbeliefs between the records he is using and the trustful reader, whom really he is deceiving all the time, by trying to create an anachronistic monster, a thirteenth-century man seen by twentieth-century eyes! Moreover, how can we hope to understand the saints, or the works of the poets and painters who described them, if we begin by dismissing the very sources of their inspiration?

The inspiration of this book is the beautiful land itself—the little convents hidden away in many a quiet wood or glen, the chapels with their gentle legends recorded in fading frescoes, the exquisite landscapes watched perhaps at sunset in the good company of some simple friar. These, with the glorious Umbrian nights, the immemorial peasant songs, the stony pathways fringed with flowers, the feudal villages still walled round and the vales still guarded by their castled heights —these teach one to realize that the human truth is not the same for every man or every period, and that the truest view of it should be that which is most memorable; for in respect of history memory is life.

III

Let us first of all make a cursory survey of "Franciscan Italy" as it lies in and around its capital, Assisi, and afterwards proceed to consider it as a period in the spiritual evolution of mankind.

The Valley of Spoleto, as old writers call it, lies on the map of central Umbria in shape like a scythe or a horn with its point at its name-city and its broader end lying towards Perugia, where it is crossed by the narrower and straighter valley of the central Tiber—as it might be, the scythe's handle. To the south across the hills is the oblong hollow of Rieti; to the north-north-west is the long straight vale of the Upper Tiber, running from the hills of Tuscany. In the symbolic parallels between the lives of Christ and Francis, so often drawn by mystical writers in the past, the former valley is the Franciscan Galilee; the second enshrines its Bethlehem, Greccio, and its Sinai, Fonte Colomba; while the third, the Valle Castellana, as it is called from Città di Castello, points up to Monte Penna, holy Alvernia, its Calvary. These three great valleys with the hills that frame them are, as it were, the proper fiefs, the spiritual domain of Francis, wherein one may safely say his name stands, and has stood for seven centuries, the first of all mankind—as one may say that Dante reigns at Florence, or Cæsar or St. Peter, as you will, at Rome. Around these frontiers are scattered outposts, at Gubbio, Todi, Sarteano or Cortona, the island of Lake Trasimene and scores of other places, where sacred memories of his passage linger still. But though these will be touched upon as we recount his story, yet they may not

be claimed in justice as his lands. They lie outside the boundaries of "Franciscan Italy."

With respect to secular history these three valleys are as corridors. Great figures, such as Popes and Emperors, are seen from time to time in their chief cities; strong waves of popular thought and feeling, such as revolts and heresies, reach with the hymns of pilgrims and the songs of troubadours to their remotest towers. Their hills give solitude to those that seek it, yet not exile or isolation. One feels somehow that they are roads to Rome.

The people of the Spoletan and Rietine Valleys are probably the descendants of the oldest race of Italy. Their habit is industrious, peaceful and conservative; their courtesy proverbial; their folklore curious and interesting. They were not barbarized even in the worst days of the invasions; gentleness and civility seem to have come down with them through all the centuries of misrule. Ignorant, perhaps, and slower than the quick-witted Tuscan, less enterprising than the North-Italian, less versatile than the Southern, in compensation they are gentler, more reflective, more devout. Their dialect is among the softest upon the lips of men; their songs are grave, poetic, serious, generally religious. Umbria has given more saints to the Church than all the rest of Italy; in short, it seems as though the suggestion of the landscape had entered into men's souls.

Until quite recently the province was among the poorest of all Italy, for the soil is not so fertile as it appears to be and the peasants in their science are exceedingly conservative, as befits the former subjects of the Popes. When the Papal States were brought into United Italy, for a generation Umbria was still more impoverished; for the convents were suppressed, their lands bought up by speculators, who cut down the forests; taxation was heavier and the new administrators quite as neglectful as the old. To-day, however, the whole land shares hard-won prosperity, while civic patriotism in this district has focussed its enthusiasm round the beloved figure of the "Poverello," ensuring reverent restoration of all that relates to him.

IV

In the city of Assisi you may wander through the open places, the streets and lanes where he played as a child, rioted and dreamed as a youth, prayed and preached as a strange portent

and a saint. Some of the streets even preserve to-day more than a mere suggestion of what they must have been. You may see the church, built over the house where he dwelt for two and twenty years; the chapel made out of the stable in which, according to a late tradition, he is said to have been born; the cathedral font wherein he was baptized; the Bishop's palace, where he renounced the world; the house of Bernard of Quintavalle, where, passing a night, he won his host to be his first companion; the crypt of the Church of St. Nicholas where they consulted the Gospel together; the house of Clare with the very door by which, as tradition holds, she left it for the Portiuncula; and finally a great part of the rich treasure of art and architecture that succeeding centuries lavished on the tomb of the "Poverello."

On the plain below and the mountain slopes above and around the city, still run the immemorial paths by which Francis and the first brothers must have passed a thousand times. By them you may go to Rivo-Torto, where a modern church covers the cell which sheltered the little Order on its return from Rome; to the site of the leper settlements near the Casa Gualdi, where Francis and his first companions tended these hapless outcasts; to the Portiuncula, the home and centre of the Order, covered by Vignola's great dome; to the mountain glen and exquisite hermitage of the Carceri, where the Saint defeated demons and was vanquished by the nightingale in an all-night contest of song; and above all, to S. Damiano, which is the casket of a thousand holy memories.

Then there is the great view at which one gazes for hours from the windows and balconies of the Hotel Subasio, the ancient city gates, or from many an open space in the quiet streets and lanes, or best of all, perhaps, from a turret of the ruined castle on the summit of the island spur that upholds Assisi into the sunlight—a place unique among human habitations for the breadth of sky that it commands.

Winter and summer the first sunbeams strike the high points of the seraphic city over the rounded shoulder of Mount Subasio; from somewhere behind Perugian hill-tops the last rays gild her western towers. Between, under the dazzling arch of day, lies one of the loveliest landscapes of the world.

If you follow with your eye the profile of Subasio, it will

lead you as it nears the plain to a low spur with cypresses and the brown towers and houses of the top of a little city; that is Spello, to be visited on a bright day for the sake of its Pinturicchios, for they bring into their dim deserted chapel the consecrated poetry of the land around. Just behind Spello, scarcely visible, are the outskirts of that busy market-town, Foligno, at the junction of roads, where Francis took his father's cloth to sell. Its chief artistic treasures are the altar-piece by Alunno and the chapel of the Trinci, frescoed by Ottaviano Nelli. Above Foligno and a little farther to the right is a small city, Trevi, built like a pyramid with a domed church at its point; if you are fortunate you will see it on a cloudy blue-and-purple day struck by a sunshaft with its windows glistening, until it seems to be built of ivory and gold. Actually its most precious treasure is a "Coronation" by Lo Spagna, unless you accept its legend of the donkey who came to listen on its knees to one of Francis's sermons! Beyond it, at the hill-foot, is Bovara, where Brother Pacifico saw the vision of the throne of Lucifer made ready for Francis in heaven. The town had its name from the herds of oxen that were penned there when they were brought to the holy waters of Clitumnus in pagan days. That exquisite pool and templed fountain lie close by in the green valley, shadowed by poplars and beloved by poets; a pretty outcrop of classicism in a mediæval land. Beyond and again to the right stands the Queen of the farther valley, venerable Spoleto, with her splendid aqueduct and her "Lombard" churches, frescoes of Filippo Lippi in her cathedral and memories of Lucrezia Borgia in her castle. It is here that Francis had the dream that made him a Knight of Christ. Above Spoleto amid ilex-woods is his exquisite hermitage of Monteluco, and beyond, in the narrowing valley, goes the road to Rome.

Across the valley the nearer spur, whose long ridge bounds our whole horizon to the south, is crowned by Montefalco, a wonderful place for a view. Its Franciscan Church has glorious frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli and its hermitage the masterpieces of Tiberio d'Assisi. The road thither from Assisi passes through Bevagna, a small town lying at the hill-foot, usually hidden by the mists that rise from the river Topino. The ancients called it "Mevania Caliginosa," but the memory of its great Roman battle is lost in the recollection of its little peace—St. Francis preaching to the birds. Nearer

to us and farther to the right is Cannara, where the Saint drew so many good folk after him that he was constrained to send them all back to their homes and to establish for them his Third Order. The long ridge hides from us Todi and the Central Tiber Valley ; the only visible village on it is Bettona, just over the great dome of the Angeli. After the ridge sinks, comes an isolated hillock with the towers of Torgiano, where a sudden gleam of water shows the meeting of the Chiascio and Topino, leisurely going down to join the Tiber through the gap. On a clear day the mountains rise tier beyond tier up to the far-distant peak of Amiata.

Now let us follow the zigzag gash in the plain's green carpet made by the usually dry bed of the torrent Tescio. The village to the left of it is Bastia, once " Isola Romanica," an island in a marsh to which the ancient forest stretched. It is now a prosperous centre of agricultural industries, through which one drives with a brief thought for its association with St. Clare. Just beyond one can trace the Chiascio by woods and patches of a deeper green away to the right, up-stream, towards the hills, past the feudal villages of Petrignano and Sterpeto, and the Rocca di S. Angelo, where St. Francis rebuked the brother who spoke ill of a poor man. The Tiber is everywhere out of sight, but at sunset you may see its mists at the foot of the farther range of hills, whose peaks are Monte Pacciano, Monte Tezio and Monte Corona. The white road to Perugia crosses it at Ponte S. Giovanni, where Francis was taken prisoner in the battle against the Perugians. It is a busy village, to be visited for the sake of the tombs of the Volumnii, which introduce one into the bosom of a noble Etrusco-Roman family with an almost embarrassing intimacy. Collestrada, a hillock to the left of the road thither, crowned with umbrella pines and a tall campanile, is associated with the episode of " The Perfect Joy."

But your eyes have long been fastened on Perugia, where she sits enthroned upon the western skyline. The central mass of the city stands against the farther mountain, and is clearest to Assisi in the morning light. The slender tower, like a pointed pencil high upon the horizon, is the belfry of S. Pietro, a rich suburban convent that must have been a veritable treasure-house of sixteenth-century art before Napoleon despoiled it of its masterpieces. In her Palace of the Captain, now the courts of Justice, St. Francis was

imprisoned after the skirmish at Ponte S. Giovanni; to her dark Canonica, hard by the Cathedral, he came to ask Pope Honorius for the great Indulgence of the Portiuncula, and in the same halls the commission sat that decided his cause for canonization; in the famous Piazza he was mocked by her young knights as he addressed the crowd from the very spot where two centuries afterwards preached his greatest follower, S. Bernardino of Siena.

For the rest, Perugia's narrow streets, her magnificent Etruscan walls, her splendid communal hall, her glorious fountain, her gallery with its Bonfigli angels, and her Exchange with its Baglioni youths, daintily posed by Perugino as strong virtues—are the subject of innumerable books. But they lie outside "Franciscan Italy," except in so far as they remind one of the relentless enemy that so often beset and once destroyed Assisi. On the neighbouring hill to the north is visible the great convent of Monte Ripido, endeared by its memories of the Blessed Giles.

But even as the life of the Saint is not a series of wonders, but one single miracle; so the loveliness around Assisi is not a number of points of interest, but one living and inspiring theme of changeful and yet constant beauty. Whether you see it in the spring, a sea of emerald, with infinite garlands of young vine-leaves hung from tree to tree above the corn; or in dusty summer, tawny yellow, like an endless green embroidery on cloth of gold; or in winter, when an icy wind seems to have cut the hills out of pure amethyst, against which the cities stand, carved in old ivory—the view is such as not a thousand brushes on a thousand canvases can render fitly or even a thousand pens make commonplace. Its distances of noble hills formed the backgrounds of the Umbrian school of artists, which, as learned critics have reminded us, were the first masters of landscape-painting to the world. Its suggestion has enriched the dreams of countless poets, from Propertius, Jacopone, Dante, down to Carducci, Pascoli, and the singers of yesterday. But, more than this, it caused some few to live, rather than write, their poems, and the inspiration of those perfect lives runs like a gold thread through it all.

V

For out of this land emerged in the first years of the thirteenth century the figure of a man that to all successive ages

has seemed the very perfect flower of Humanity. Intellectually simple, although of marvellous spiritual intelligence, he cast a spell over his rough and virile generation, over men of every walk of life and the utmost diversity of mind—over statesmen like the great Pope Innocent, diplomatists like the wise Pope Gregory, sceptics like the Sultan Malek-el-Kamil, lawyers like Peter of Cataneo, organizers like Elias of Cortona, poets like William of Lisciano, dogmatists like Dominic of Calaroga, besides countless thousands of unknown people, barons and serfs, peasants and soldiers, merchants and robbers. Other outstanding figures of past ages were either born to great positions, made prominent by circumstance, or were gifted to a high degree with some great quality of intellect, of physical beauty or peculiar skill in art. In all the vast roll of history you will search long before you find another who, like Francis, owes nothing of his influence to any of these things.

Well might Masseo ask, "Why after thee? Why after thee? Thou art not fair to look upon; thou art not a man of parts; thou art not of noble birth. Whence comes it then that all the world are following after thee?" And Francis's answer, "Wouldst thou know why after me? Know that I have this from those eyes of the most high God, which everywhere behold the righteous and the wicked, that forasmuch as those most holy eyes have beheld among sinners none more vile, more imperfect, nor a greater sinner than I, therefore since He hath found no viler creature on earth to accomplish the marvellous work that He intendeth, He hath chosen me to confound the nobility, the majesty, the might, the beauty and the wisdom of the world; in order to make manifest that every virtue and every good thing cometh from Him the Creator, and not from the creature, and that none may glory in His presence; but he that glories shall glory in the Lord, to whom belong all glory and all honour for ever and ever."

But the modern world is not content with that stupendous answer. It reiterates the persistent question of Masseo. It cannot rest content to leave St. Francis merely as a miracle —one of those strange inexplicable portents that arise from time to time to perplex our human histories and confound our science; for it is the duty of science to protect itself from such miracles, seeing that upon this scientific principle the modern world, as distinct from the mediæval world, is

ultimately based. As far as it is possible, we must therefore try to resolve the charm into its elements, to analyse the portent and reduce it into terms that more or less we think we understand.

Probably the particular human quality, in which St. Francis lives with the modern world, is as a supreme religious artist, with an exquisite sensibility as to spiritual values and a unique power of dramatic self-expression. All through his life he is either the hero of episodes that seize the imagination and impress themselves indelibly upon the memory, or he is uttering parables and inventing images, which no one, having read or heard them, can easily forget. It is manifest that he had all the shining virtues—courage and humility, love and purity, joy and compassion, courtesy and holiness; so had other saints. It is in the expression of these qualities that he excels them all. No human soul so bright as his ever shone out so clearly through the fleshly veil; there seems to be an actual radiance about him. By reason of this heavenly quality he ranks with the great poets as a creator of the common imagination of mankind; and the simple stories of his life take their places in the world's literature with those of Dante and the Bible.

Many other saints renounced the world—who beside Francis stripped himself naked in the public square with a gesture that amazes us to-day as much as it must have startled good Bishop Guido and the worthy burghers of Assisi? Others have followed poverty in squalor—who before him revealed her loveliness, and worshipped her in all the pomp of chivalrous romance? Others loved birds, yet who but he called them his sisters, preached to them and actually bewitched them to attend? Others have suffered mental tortures, dwelling on the Passion'; it was reserved for him, and those who followed, to bear in their flesh the visible scars of Christ. But quite apart from these excelling instances, it was his privilege to impresss himself at all times upon circumstance in all the startling contrasts of his moods—his ecstasies, his penitence, his passion and his patience, his courtesy and his amazing candour. Thus there is always in him something unexpected, and to each man he presents another phase. To some he is a saintly poet, opening mediæval eyes to the loveliness of life; but these forget his fasts, his tears, his stigmatization. To others he is the democrat, the leveller, the reformer; but these

forget his lowliness, his reverence for the priests, his courteous respect for earthly greatness. For others again he is the heaven-born Seraph, whose each predestined perfect act was patterned upon Christ, but these in turn forget so many human things! He took unto himself all the qualities of his period—the sanctity of the hermit, the romance of the knight, the poetry and idealism of the troubadour; and he gave them all their brightest incarnation. Yet not like many another saint was he imprisoned in his century; Dominic, Bernard, Thomas of Aquinas, great as they are, they are all enmeshed in the systems that made them and the causes they inspired. But Francis is not provincial but universal, not temporary but eternal; to every time and type alike he is both old and new, simple and inexhaustible, heavenly and human—Image of Christ in the Mirror of Mankind.

CHAPTER II

Assisi in St. Francis's Day—The Walls and Churches—Conditions of the Time—Castles, Convents and Cities—Heresy—Politics—St. Francis in Prison.

I

AS the mind of every man partakes of the main spiritual currents of his place and period, it is necessary to consider some few of those elements that contributed to the environment of St. Francis. To return to our symbol of the Tree, so common in Franciscan story, we must not be content to contemplate alone the trunk and branches, but must first lightly turn the soil and then briefly examine the roots that spread out far and wide within it.

The city of Assisi towards the end of the twelfth century was a relatively prosperous little city, of a gay oriental and brightly-coloured aspect that would seem fantastic to our eyes. The Emperor Charlemagne had destroyed the ancient Umbro-Roman town with its colonnades and temples, like the magnificent Minerva that still rules the market-place. Charlemagne, having vainly assaulted the old Roman walls, entered their circuit by a drain and put the whole population to the sword for their temerity in having resisted him. But then "this most clement King"—the expression is the Chronicler's—"for compassion of that massacre commanded that the town should be rebuilt, and so it was restored." The streets arose irregularly, with small buildings amid great ruins; the architecture had as yet no trace of Gothic, being rather Etruscan, Romanesque and Byzantine in design.

The mediæval city was largely built of wood, which, as the hills and slopes and much of the plain were covered with forests, was cheap to work and plentiful. Judging from a municipal document at the end of the twelfth century, in which the commune promised to help the nobles to build houses within the city in compensation for the destruction of their towers without, the ground-floors up to the height of

some ten to twelve feet were usually built of stone, above which the wooden structures were erected, tier over tier, with flat projecting roofs and balconies and wooden posts for columns, generally plastered over and painted with bright colours. In short, the architecture of the Giottesque frescoes may not be nearly so fanciful as many have imagined, for it represents in its symbolic fashion the wooden structures in combination with the more solid walls of stone. Something resembling the type may be seen to-day in Turkish and Armenian villages. Besides abundance of materials, this kind of architecture presented other advantages in days when the absence of glass caused windows to be small and narrow, closed against wind and rain by solid shutters ; for upon these roofs and loggias the women lived and spun and wove, while the men lived in the streets. Its great disadvantages were found in times of war and civil strife—as, for instance, when German Emperors burnt such cities ; while during the struggles between great families, Guelf and Ghibelline, in the following century, this partly wooden architecture largely disappeared, and thenceforward fortresses with gloomy towers darkened the narrow streets. For by that time the citizens had brought the curse of Feudalism within the circuit of their walls.

The walls of the ancient city of St. Francis were not so extensive as those of the Assisi of to-day. Their most westerly point was near S. Giacomo, whence they followed the edge of the steep fall of ground, till they crossed the modern Via Portica close to the old Seminary and thence ran down to the Via Fonte Marcella, enclosing the Confraternity of the Stigmata, near to which was a fine Roman Gate, now built into the Palazzo Fiumi ; and down again through gardens to St. Apolinare, where was another gate, the Porta Sementone, now built into the Convent ; and so round the Bishop's Palace, hard by the old Cathedral of Sta. Maria Maggiore. This church is said to have been built on the site of a temple of Janus, from which is probably derived the name of the Gate, the Porta Mojano—Porta Monti Jano. Thence, skirting the ravine, the walls climbed up towards the eleventh-century cathedral of S. Rufino and thus to the Piazza Nuova and the Porta Perlice, that is, the Porta Per l'Asio, the gate for the mountain. They traversed to the east a wilderness of ruins,—theatre, amphitheatre, tombs and catacombs, and excluded to the west a long, bare, rocky spur, the " Collis Infernus " or Lower Hill,

LA CITTÀ SERAFICA
No. 1 House of Comaccini.
2 Convent of Sta. Croce.
3 Comunal Library.
4 Convent of St. Sebastian.
5 Chapel of Pilgrims.
6 Convent of S. Angelo de Panzo.
7 Confrat. of Stimmate.
8 House of Bernard of Quintavalle.
9 Convent of S. Quirico.
10 Convent of Collatines.
11 Ch. of S. Maria Maggiore and Bishops Palace.
12 Ch. of St. Niccolo
13 Peoples Palace & Minerva Temple.
14 House of St. Francis or Chiesa Nuova.
15 Stable of St Francis's birth.
16 House of Sa Clare.
17 Cathedral.
P. erta di S. Francesco
P. S. Giacomo
P. S. Pietro
Chiesa e Badia di S. Pietro
Roccia or Cassero Maggiore (Castle)
Portaccia P. di Sementone
Mon. S. Apollinaris
Mon. S. Paolo
P. Perlici
Chiesa e Mon. di S. Chiara
Rocchicciuola or Cassero minore (Lesser Castle)
P. S. Antonio o dei Cappuccini
P. Nuova
Roman Walls of St. Francis's time
13th Century extension
14th Century circuit (Present Walls)
A. E. TAYLOR. 26.

that possibly was once a place of executions. It is most important to get a clear idea of the extent of the Franciscan city, and a pleasant afternoon may be well spent in tracing these old walls through the lines of the houses built on their foundations. The poor streets between the cathedral, the Piazza Nuova and the Porta Perlice, give the best idea of the ancient town, especially the Via del Commune Vecchio, which contains near its eastern end the old Palace of the Priors, the small two-storied building wherein the civic administration was actually carried on during St. Francis's lifetime. The great cathedral in his youth was practically finished; the German castle on the summit of the hill was, when he came to manhood, practically destroyed. Among the houses stood a number of small Romanesque churches, Sta. Maria Maggiore—the former cathedral—S. Niccolô, near the Forum, S. Paolo to the north, S. Stefano to the west, S. Giacomo inside the north-west gate, and S. Giorgio outside the eastern; while farther off were S. Masseo, S. Damiano, S. Donato, and Sta. Croce at the hill-foot, and the convent church of S. Pietro, a little way above it. Here and there amid woods and tilth were scattered feudal castles.

The mountain slopes and the plain below were covered by forests, that stretched down towards a wide marsh around Bastia, known to old writers as the "Umbrian Lake." The forest was perhaps less wood than waste, intersected here and there by bridle-paths, which usually followed the line of the paved Roman roads. These tracks were used by merchant-traders with their pack-mules, by cavalcades of knights and men-at-arms, and by pilgrims to and from the Holy Land or the Tombs of the Apostles. The chief way in the immediate neighbourhood was the Via Francesca—the French road—which skirted the foot of the hill. Of human habitations there were generally three types—castles, convents, cities—corresponding to three types of men, three interests, three allegiances—the castles to the barons, who were usually Teutonic; the convents to great abbeys, feudal also; the cities to the traders, rising now to wealth and seeking independence.

By the end of the twelfth century it was nigh upon seven hundred years that the fair land of Italy had been a constant prey to incursions of military bandits of Teutonic race. Visigoths and Ostrogoths, Franks, Alamans and Lombards

had each in turn passed like destroying pestilences, leaving little trace upon the land except destruction, or a temporary change of feudal masters. Totila sacked Assisi, Charlemagne razed and rebuilt her; Otho destroyed Tadino; more lately Barbarossa burnt Spoleto, Bevagna and Amelia. In the intervals of peace the land revived; the starving inhabitants returned to their roofless homes and devastated vineyards, and in a generation or so all was the same, save for one horrible episode the more stamped into human memory. At each incursion or invasion new migrants settled, usually entrenched within new castles. But time did little to assimilate the new-comers to the Latin civilization of the natives. They continued to practise their original calling; lived in strong towers on mountain crags; hunted and fought and robbed, despising manual labour and reducing the peasants on the lands they seized to the level of feudal serfs. Their idleness gave them leisure for military exercise; their racial arrogance and corporate dependence on the toil of others ensured a measure of common discipline. They followed their own laws and customs, that were odious to the Latins, such as scales of payment for outrages and murders, according to the rank of the victim, and trial by ordeal of fire, water or battle, in place of judgment based on law and evidence. Their arrogance, their ignorance, their savagery and disorder form the so-called "Darkness of the Middle Ages," a phrase that could be fairly rendered "Teutonic Domination."

Under these circumstances, it is not unnatural that for several centuries the chief centres of wealth and learning were the monasteries, which were usually endowed with feudal lands and protected by lay retainers—men-at-arms. The Abbey of St. Benedict upon Subasio, for example, owned nearly all the mountain, as well as large territories on the plain; in 1244 it possessed nine churches and seventeen chapels, scattered through the districts of Assisi, Foligno, Spello, Cannara, Bevagna, and Bettona; to each chapel was a little house attached. The ruins of this great monastery, with its apse and its crypt containing nine twelfth-century columns, may still be found high up on Subasio towards Spello by those who do not shun a stony climb. Two hours beyond it are the remains of the Abbey of S. Silvestro, Abbot of which—says a local legend—was at one time Ugolino, Francis's friend, afterwards Cardinal Protector of his Order

and, later still, Pope Gregory IX. Another great religious house was that of Sassovivo at a short distance from Foligno, of which a magnificent cloister still remains to tell of the wealth and splendour of the older orders in St. Francis's day. Besides these there were many smaller monastic owners, which accounted between them for the numerous little convents, chapels, shrines and hermitages scattered around the cities and the feudal villages.

The predominance in the secular world of races of a lower civilization had the natural effect of driving gentler spirits into religious life. The studious became monks, the mystics hermits, who built for themselves oratories in lonely places, protected from the brigands by poverty and awe. Modern security has made the world impatient of monasticism and forgetful of the incalculable debt we owe to it. In Umbria, besides a thousand other services, the Benedictines drained the swamps and cleared the forests and saved the land from falling back to a malarious primeval waste. They supplied the engineers, the architects and the scholars of these centuries; they were the trustees for the new world of the great heritage of the old.

But one must never forget that Italian life—we had almost written, Mediterranean—has at all times been essentially urban, to an extent unknown in Teuton or Nordic lands. The city-states of Greece or Latium, Umbria or Etruria, were the units of ancient civilization and continued so throughout the Middle Ages, when the northern races were still dwelling to a great extent in agricultural villages. In the cities of Italy the torch of education had never been extinguished; the cathedral and monastic schools kept the tradition and from them the monks and scholars were steadily recruited. In the towns the arts and crafts developed to the stimulus of individual emulation and jealous civic pride; whence until recent times the cities seldom co-operated. The Teutonic invaders of Italy occasionally destroyed, but never subdued the cities in any social sense. They little affected the language. They only enslaved the undefended peasants, a different stock, an older race, bound immemorially to the soil. The vivid voluble life of the town was alien to them; if ever they entered it, they were speedily absorbed.

Now already by the increasing trade of the more peaceful years, and especially during the reign of the Countess Matilda

of Tuscany, the power of the larger towns was advancing under the ægis of the Church. The incompetence of the German seneschals gave great opportunity to the Bishops, who grew in strength as rivals to the secular authorities and favoured the growth and independence of the municipalities. The tolls exacted by the barons became more and more intolerable and city after city was more and more involved in a perennial quarrel with the petty tyrants of the countryside. It was in the cathedrals and around their bishops that the citizens gathered to proclaim their liberties; and the building of the Duomo became a national and civic, as well as a religious, expression of the time. It was thus in her old cathedral, Sta. Maria Maggiore, that, in the great year of the Legnano, Assisi decided to despatch her communal contingent to join in the national war of liberation, and it was in the building of her new cathedral of S. Rufino that eventually her civic soul emerged to life.

For already the men who thronged her streets and open spaces were manifestly inspired by a new spirit, born partly of the new assurance of their more material needs. The burghers soon surpassed the barons in pride and sumptuous raiment, being quick to the appeal of pageantry. Each family took part in the corporate life with a far greater intensity than men are wont to do to-day, for common pride and common danger bred a strong civic consciousness. The citizens built or sprang to arms, feasted, disputed, worshipped or derided with a unanimity and an alacrity unknown to our individualistic times. Of racial theories they knew little, except the prejudice that difference taught them; of constitutional law still less, save the instinct to be free. But their generation was alive with spiritual ferment, that showed itself in every phase of life.

II

It has been a custom of historians to regard the Franciscan movement as a reaction against the deep spiritual darkness and corruption of its time. Here there has been a great deal of exaggeration. The historical evidence hardly justifies belief in such a parodox. For Italy in the thirteenth century was perhaps the one part of Europe in which a St. Francis could have occurred, and this because on the whole the secular life was gentler there than in other lands. For the marvel

is not so much that he existed, as that he excited interest and found followers among men.

Nor should we take too literally the witness of recorders, for whom every history must have a moral. All history naturally tends to be slanderous, on account of that innate propensity of men to tell ill-natured tales. But most unfortunate of all are those nations and those generations that have had holy men for their historians, for they may in no wise escape from the assumption that their misfortunes are justified by their depravities and that their story must be made to form a lesson to their descendants. From this fate few centuries have suffered more than this, the twelfth, and few lands more than Franciscan Italy.

Doubtless the chroniclers had one good cause for scandal in a prevalent and peculiarly pernicious kind of heresy, which had an eastern, a Hungarian or Bulgarian, source. Albeit, in its milder forms, it seems to have been little more than a political anti-clericalism, a rage against the wealth of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the great religious orders with an occasional demand for simpler ceremonies, fewer sacraments, a less elaborate ritual, yet in its inward nature it contained a most virulent germ of Manicheanism, than which no mystical disease can be more deadly. For the doctrine of the eternal and essential evilness of matter, besides implying a denial of the Incarnation, led its votaries on the one hand to the denunciation of marriage and to extreme asceticism and self-torture, and on the other to the grossest immorality. In its milder forms this heresy was very prevalent in Italy among the middle and the lower middle classes of the towns. In 1203 the citizens of Assisi actually elected a heretic as their Podestà, that is their chief municipal official, for the anti-clericals had become in fact a political party, backed by the German barons.

But this heresy was only one of the many signs of ferment, which as a whole was working for the triumph of the Church. It was largely a result of the Crusades. For the Crusades had weakened feudalism by decimating the adventurous, by impoverishing noble families, by causing them to sell or pledge estates. The religious orders profited by bequests and the temporary use of lands entrusted to their care while the lords went to the East. The cities benefited, too, by the hosts of travelling strangers and the new routes for trade

that the wars opened up. Moreover, if travel be a form of education, the world had it to an extent unknown since the great migrations. It is impossible to conceive the effect of Venice, Palermo, or Constantinople upon the mind of a mediæval youth who had never left his feudal village. New luxuries, new needs, new visions were created; new sins, new pestilences, new heresies. The imagination of mankind was reawakened, and imagination is the seed of life. From this sprang the chivalry, afterwards cast back into an earlier period; from this the poetry of the troubadour that set half Europe singing; from this the magic of romance, the knightly tales of wandering minstrels; from this, humanly speaking, the vision of our Saint.

Moreover, the Crusades placed undreamed-of weapons in the Papal hands. A Legate at every Christian court was established as recruiting officer, with authority to grant indulgences to all who took the cross or made a money contribution to the cause. Again, Crusades could be declared not only against Moslems, but also against heretics and Christian potentates. Power without limit awaited the strong hand that could wield it, and from 1198 for sixteen years the hand was that of the great Pope Innocent III. Almost his first act was to claim the so-called "Donation of Constantine," as confirmed by Charlemagne's decree and the will of Matilda of Tuscany, and to compel the German counts and seneschals of Central Italy to fly the land or make submission.

So it came about that Conrad von Lützen, Seneschal of Assisi, was commanded by the Pope to go to Narni, carrying with him his castle's keys. But Pope and Seneschal alike counted without the citizens, who on their lord's departure rushed to arms, stormed his fortress and razed it to the ground; then with great energy, using its stones and such others as came to hand, they rebuilt and restored their city walls, the better to defend their new-won liberty. But not yet was the pent-up fury born of centuries of oppression glutted upon the arrogance and avarice of the aliens. The Assisans next proceeded against the castles of the neighbouring German barons, and tower after tower falling into their hands was speedily levelled with the ground. The walls that they built still stand to-day, the castle-rock remained without a castle for 150 years. It is most important to remember, as one gazes at the city outspread beneath from

the turret of the fortress rebuilt by Cardinal Albornoz in 1367, that through all the thirteenth century there was no castle on the hill-top and no secular lord of the land.

The inhabitants of the towers were spared and set at liberty. Many were given houses, built for them within the walls at communal expense; but others fled to Perugia and induced the Perugians to take up their cause against Assisi. For, albeit not necessarily at war, there was always a jealous rivalry between the two cities; lands were continually in dispute between them, constantly harried by one family or the other, an often-wasted "No-man's Land," like the Anglo-Scottish Border. But Assisi in her new enthusiasm acted with greater ardour than discretion. Her forces advanced into the disputed territory at Ponte S. Giovanni on the Tiber, only to be completely defeated by the better-trained Perugians. A number of Assisan nobles and burghers were taken prisoner, remaining in confinement for over a year in a prison that stood on the site of the palace of the Captain of the People, now the Law Courts.

Among them was a slight youth of twenty years of age, gentle, serious, yet vivacious, whose charm and wit were the chief solace of the captives' weary days.

"Surely," said one of them to him, "you are mad to be so merry in prison."

"Would you know why I am so merry?" he answered. "The day will come when all the world will bow to me in homage." From that optimism and that characteristic aspiration we may recognize Francesco di Pietro Bernardone.

CHAPTER III

St. Francis's Home—His Parents and Upbringing—His Illness—His Spiritual Crisis—His Visit to Rome—The Lepers.

I

THE house in which Francis was born and lived for some two and twenty years stood but a few steps from the central market-place or forum, behind what is now the Town Hall. The site is occupied by the Chiesa Nuova, erected in 1605, a dull but meritorious edifice. Every one will regret that seventeenth-century piety left so little of the old building, but possibly the original house had already long disappeared. The Friars, who have a little convent there, will show you the original house-door and a sort of cave or dungeon, closed by an ancient grating, with a slight kneeling figure in it, his raised hands loaded with chains. It represents Francis imprisoned by his father for having sold some paternal bales to obtain the money to repair S. Damiano. In the convent there is an excellent library of Franciscan literature and a charming little garden with an infinite variety of flowers.

A few yards away is the tiny chapel of S. Francescuccio, that is, of the infant Francis, formed, it is said, from the stable in which the child was born. For his mother had been for a long while in travail when she was warned by a mysterious pilgrim that only in a stable could her child be brought to birth. The pious tale is probably no more than the product of devotion, eager to find external parallels to enhance the resemblance between the lives of Francis and of Christ. It is not told in any of the historical authorities, although the tradition may be traced to the beginning of the fifteenth century. Possibly the stable originally adjoined the house, the present dividing street having been formed for access after the little building was made into a chapel.

The father of Francesco was Pietro Bernardone, according to some authorities of a family from Lucca. He was a cloth-

merchant who carried on his trade between customers in Umbria, Tuscany and Provence. So prosperous was he, or possibly so personable, that on one of his journeys he was able to obtain the hand of the Lady Pica, a daughter of a Provençal noble, perhaps the Count of Boulement, " Domina," " Domna," or " Donna Pica " as she invariably is called with all respect. There is no reason to treat this as a " pious legend," since what Assisan would invent a story that makes their greatest fellow-citizen half a Frenchman ? We may take it then that somewhere about the year 1180 Bernardone brought back his bride to his home in Assisi and soon set out once more upon his journeys into France. He was away when the eldest son was born and christened Giovanni, but on his return he called him by a new name, " the Frenchman."

Provence was at this time, before the Albigensian persecutions, the wealthiest and the most civilized of the provinces of Europe, if we leave out of consideration the Empire of Constantinople and the semi-oriental lands under its control. A lady from Provence would be superior in culture to most of the ladies of Assisi. In his father's constant absence Francis would be continually under his mother's care. Instinctively one feels he was " his mother's son," and that while he learnt his letters and his Latin from the good priests of S. Giorgio, who kept a school hard by the eastern gate, where now is the Church and Convent of Sta. Chiara, at home he learnt other and more important things that formed the rich poetic fabric of his mind—legends of chivalry, then being told and sung for the first time at the Italian courts and fairs, stories of Tristram and King Arthur, of Charlemagne and Roland, of the ancient knights of Troy, Fiesole and Rome,—tales of the travelling minstrel or jongleur—songs of the Troubadours recited in honour of fair ladies at Provençal Courts of Love. The stream of chivalric poetry was now entering Italy ; Pierre Vidal and Rambaud de Vaqueiras were welcomed at the court of Boniface of Monferrat in the last years of the century, when Francis of Assisi was about fourteen years of age. The third Crusade of 1190 brought hundreds of French and English knights through Italy, to fight under the banner of Richard Cœur de Lion. Doubtless they sang their northern lays and told their northern tales. But here, in a small Umbrian city, was a strange little fountain-head of this new wine of romance, where a gentle lively boy of imaginative genius was absorbing

the fresh inspiration directly from his mother. His boyish dissatisfaction with the commonplace, his spiritual restiveness, is revealed in every action of his youth that has come down to us—riotous escapades, daring and whimsical enterprises that made him the acknowledged leader of the wild spirits of the town, fits of pity or remorse when he would kiss some paragon of human hideousness that at first excited his disgust, and impulses of reckless generosity when he would press into a beggar's hand what was not his to give, incurring punishment, not all unjust, for the compassionate misdeed.

There are few figures in history whose features stand so clearly marked as his before us, and every portrait shows him in eagerness or intentness, entirely absorbed in one luminous idea. There was no measure, no restraint in his enthusiasm. His whole life was one chivalrous adventure of knight-errantry; he was always a paladin fighting for God and the fame of his mistress, the Lady Poverty. He was always a soldier; Obedience meant for him the rigid military virtue. He was always a Crusader, marking his garments with a cross in chalk, and wearing a symbolic cord in place of a knightly belt. He was, as it were by profession, a minstrel, the troubadour and laureate of a chosen band of minstrels. His theme was the glory of his King and the beauty of his lady, and he dined of right at his lord's table as the reward of his song.

It was his mother who taught him chivalry, with the legends and customs and the poetry of her native land and the language in which he learned to fashion from such knightly tales the dreams that in after days embodied higher inspirations and gave them their imaginative substance and creative force. She watched his boyish eccentricities, his impulsive acts of kindness, his shyness and boasting, depressions and exaltations, his courage and hypersensitiveness, his baffling contradictions, his rapid transitions of mood. She pondered his strange sayings, his passion for beauty and glory, his wild romantic dreams. When neighbours said that he would be a knight, she would answer that her son would be a man of God. She trusted him through all his boyish scrapes and escapades and defended him from his father's wrath, standing between his otherworldliness and the mundane wishes of the merchant family. We owe a great deal to Madonna Pica.

II

Probably as a result of his imprisonment in Perugia, Francis on his return to his home lay sick for many days of a low fever. His biographers attribute to this period of pain, solitude and recollection those first vague yearnings after eternal spiritual treasure that were the first steps in the slow process of his conversion. Thomas of Celano in his earlier Life of the Saint, written within four years of his death, devotes two chapters to this incident, describing how the sick youth, tottering in his weakness to the city gate, gazed at the glorious landscape stretched below him, to find " that the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards and all that is fair to the eye could no longer gladden him, so that he was astonished at the change that had come over him and thought them foolish who could love such things."

But with returning health came back the old ambitions. Once more he dreamed of knightly fame, of fighting for the freedom of his Church and country against the hated Germans, that under specious feudal pretext still infested the land. He became a leader of youthful revellers, who followed him, a few perhaps for the material benefits of his generosity, but more, the best of them, on account of his wealth and prodigality of spirit and that compelling charm he ever exerted over man and beast. With him those comrades had most likely taken part in the destruction of the tyrants' strongholds and the repairing of the city walls to defend their freedom ; with him a few had fought at Ponte S. Giovanni and shared the bitterness of the captivity which followed. Francis was not daunted by that defeat ; he dreamed of arms and palaces which mysterious voices promised him as the guerdon of great deeds.

At length a chance came to accompany a noble of Assisi who was to join the Papal forces under Walter de Brienne and assist him to drive the Germans out of southern Italy. Francis enrolled himself under this banner and, aided by his father, prepared a magnificent equipment. Doubtless he was the envy of the young gallants of the town. One can picture the brilliant little cavalcade setting out, after much flattery, many embraces, many tears, on the sunlit track between the vineyards for Spoleto. Yet the following evening the young hero had come back, with no more than a dream to excuse the great refusal ! For at Spoleto a Voice had asked him, " Francis, whom is it better to serve, the master or the servant ? Why

dost thou choose the servant rather than the master? Return to the land of thy birth and there it shall be told thee what thou shalt do."

Physically, it is obvious that Francis was quite unfit to be a soldier; spiritually, he must have been quickly disillusioned; yet ideally or romantically it was upon the knightly virtues that his whole work was based: on courage, not to face a foe in arms, but to brave ridicule and humiliation; on fortitude to bear almost intolerable hardship; on loyalty and obedience without questioning or reasoning, or asking to know more than one step at a time.

We are told that he actually went back without repining; his nature was extraordinarily resilient. He took up his old life and became once more the leader of the revellers. It is surely a tribute to his charm and the singular generosity of his father that the youth of the town still followed him. But the flow of his gaiety would now often be interrupted by fits of taciturnity. "Art thou thinking of taking a wife that thou art so long silent?" one of his companions asked him. "Yes, I am thinking of marrying, but the bride I wish to win is nobler, richer and more beautiful than any woman you have ever known."

It is said he was already dreaming of the Lady Poverty. In any case, she was the image of some far-away princess, like that Lady of Tripoli who by her courtesy to pilgrims drew the Provençal troubadour, Geoffrey Rudel, across the sea. Whether or not she was the Virtue which, as Dante tells us, for a thousand and a hundred years and more had lived despised until Francis came to claim her, she was an embodiment of spiritual love in earthly guise, quite incomprehensible to his fellow-revellers.

He had one confidant, at this time, as to whose identity there has been much speculation. It has even been suggested that he was Elias of Beviglie, whose influence over Francis in later days was inexplicable to his enemies. Alone or with this friend, Francis would wander upon the mountains and hide in some cavern or Etruscan tomb on the pretext of seeking some hidden treasure; in reality, say the records, to wrestle with God in prayer. Prof. Pennacchi has a curious note in this connection that over the Ponte S. Vettorino on the far side of the Tescio is a region known as "Le Grotte," where there are "caves" or rather ancient cellars of a large Roman villa,

with an immemorial tradition of hidden treasure, as witness a common saying among the street-boys of Assisi : " Give me a soldo ! " " No, go to Le Grotte ! " There is another such cave or tomb, close to Beviglie, the birthplace of Elias, of which we shall speak in due time. The whole idea, romantic or symbolical, is very characteristic of Francis, who would hide himself away for hours in such " caves." Sometimes he would cry aloud in the anguish of his soul and at length emerge into the sunlight, haggard with suffering. He was passing through the phase of spiritual night, known to all mystics, relieved by dazzling flashes of illumination. He was haunted by nervous terrors of physical deformity ; by moral sickness, paroxysms of self-scorn and self-abasement. At other times he would speak cryptically of his great treasure. His spiritual director seems to have been the Bishop Guido, who shows himself in the whole story as a man of kindliness and wisdom. No doubt he thought that Francis would become a monk of some established order, and having but lately been himself to Rome, probably suggested pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles.

We do not know what impression Rome made on Francis. It was then a city of almost classical aspect, filled with great ruinous colonnades, theatres and thermæ in magnificent decay. The Septizonium and the other Imperial mansions upon the Palatine were still in part inhabitable ; the Coliseum had not suffered the spoliation of the Barbarini ; the earthquake of 1349 had not yet overthrown the monuments of the Forum, or the civic anarchy of the seventy years of the " Babylonian Captivity " had not yet converted all the ruins into baronial towers. That curious contemporary pilgrim's guide-book, the " Mirabilia Urbis Romæ," tells us there stood within its walls no fewer than twelve triumphal arches, palaces twenty, thermæ ten, castles two score and nine, theatres seven, besides the Coliseum, horses of gilded brass two score and at least as many cemeteries, with holy places on every hand and infinite marvels told about them. It should have been a place of wonder to this imaginative youth, his mind filled with the gorgeous legends of the " Ancient Cavaliers," with their rich phantasmagoria of old gods grown into devils, of ancient poets turned magicians, of warriors and lawgivers disguised as knights and bishops. But Francis only saw the niggardly pilgrims giving coins of small value in return for what he held

to be privileges beyond price, and with characteristic generosity and perhaps a touch of scornful ostentation emptied his purse of gold into the Apostles' shrine. He watched the many beggars at the portals of St. Peter's displaying their sores for the compassion of the crowd, and in order the better to realize their humiliation, he changed clothes with one of them and for a day stood begging in his place. It is to be noted that he begged in Provençal, his maternal language, the tongue which, though he spoke it badly, he used in all the solemn and the happy moments of his life.

Returning to Assisi he sought out the beggars in their hovels, instead of merely aiding those that appealed to him on the roads. He even entertained them at his house, in the absence of his father, one would conjecture. One day the Lady Pica found the table laid with bread and meat for a large company. Francis had invited the poor.

But there remained the lepers, the unfortunates who were gathered into lazarets, out of the sight, smell, hearing of the world. Francis one day was riding homewards across the plain when suddenly a leper rose from the side of the path about ten paces from him, startling his horse, and causing in the young man a natural recoil of horror. About to throw down a coin and ride on, Francis remembered "that it behove him first of all to conquer himself, if he wished to be a soldier of Christ," so he dismounted, and as he gave his alms he took the leper's hand in his and kissed it. One account says that he embraced him and that before he had mounted no trace of the leper could be seen! In any case thenceforward he saw his Master's image in these ghastly ruins of humanity.

The lazaret was situated half-way between the city and the Portiuncula, near the spot where to-day the driving road bends to the right and the steep slope begins. Here he would often visit them bringing gifts more precious than gold, courtesy for their harsh resentment, love for their self-loathing, faith for their impious denial and rebellion, hope for their despair. For himself, this victory over his shrinking flesh must have had deep significance, for he tells us in his testament, "what had seemed bitter hitherto was thereafter changed to sweet"

CHAPTER IV

S. Damiano—St. Francis's Conversion—His Renunciation of the World—His Journey to Gubbio—St. Francis restores S. Damiano.

I

OF all the shrines that cluster around Assisi none is more fragrant with Franciscan memories than the little convent of S. Damiano. Until a year or so ago the pleasantest way to reach it was to clamber by certain small paths through the fields, skirting the old walls of golden stone mantled with ivy and clematis, dipping through tiny glens with their streams, their poplars and infinite flowers, passing by ancient fern-fringed tanks and pools of mossy antiquity, by little shrines and towered farms that carried one back to feudal days. But progress has decreed that a new road should be cut through all this loveliness and nature as yet has not had time to repair the havoc wrought. Some day perhaps the thoroughfare will afford a charming shady stroll for citizens on summer evenings, when its avenue of tiny ilex—" trees of remembrance " for the last war's dead—will have grown up to maturity. But for the moment all is ruin, stones and glare, where once was peace and shade and green, and it is perhaps better to-day to pass up through the city to the quarter of Sta. Chiara and then drop steeply down the high-road outside the farther gate.

But in the town of Francis's day the quarter of Sta. Chiara had no part. The old walls ceased, on the hither side of the ravine that runs up to the east of the Porta Moiano. It was therefore by this gate, or by that by which the Corso debouches on to the Piazza Sta. Chiara, that Francis reached S. Damiano, a tiny oratory, built in the old Romanesque style, dedicated to the doctor-saint and probably belonging to the cathedral—not to the Benedictines, as some authorities have said. It had an aged priest in charge and a fine Byzantine crucifix.

From the ruthless hands of the ecclesiastical restorer this

mediæval reliquary has miraculously been spared, although the façade was more beautiful before the modern statue of St. Clare was erected in front of it. The enlightenment of a future generation may suppress this well-meaning embellishment as the heavy baroque altars have been lately removed from the interior. You enter the small time-blackened nave by a few steps leading downwards, which is held to prove that the oldest part was the still smaller and lower choir. Over the altar hangs a modern copy of the crucifix; in the little apse behind the choir a very ancient fresco has been uncovered, a Madonna and Child between S. Damiano and S. Rufino.

At the time of which we are writing the chapel was in a ruinous condition, but it is unnecessary to take this, as some historians have done, as an outward sign of lack of zeal within the Church. For if construction is to be the test, no more zealous generation can be found than this, when even in a small city like Assisi, many churches were a-building, including the great cathedral of S. Rufino. It is quite conceivable that the little oratory suffered in the fighting of ten years before, when the towers of the nobles generally, and especially a certain castle on the slope of S. Damiano, were razed to the ground.

Francis, says St. Bonaventure, "having gone forth one day to meditate in the fields, was walking nigh the Church of S. Damiano, which for its great age was threatening to fall, and at the prompting of the Spirit entered it to pray. Prostrating himself before an Image of the Crucified, he was filled with consolation, and as with eyes full of tears, he gazed on the Lord's Cross, he heard with his bodily ears a Voice proceeding from that cross, saying thrice over, 'Francis, go and repair My House, which, as thou seest, is falling into ruin.'

"Then Francis trembled, being alone in the church, and was astonished at the wondrous Voice, and, perceiving in his heart the power of the divine speech, he was carried out of himself in ecstasy. But coming to himself at length, he straightway prepared to obey."

Returning to the city, he gathered up some bales of cloth and sold them with his horse in the market of Foligno, and walking back the ten miles to S. Damiano, offered the money to the priest in charge, asking permission to abide with him. The priest consented to his remaining, but refused the money, realizing that it belonged to Pietro Bernardone, who, sure enough, a few hours later arrived in a fury accompanied by

" THE MIRACULOUS CRUCIFIX "

(formerly in St. Damiano, since preserved in the Church of Ste. Chiara, Assisi)

his friends. Then Francis's heart failed him and he concealed himself, not daring to face the final crisis, which he knew would be now precipitated by paternal wrath. He remained in hiding and hesitation for a whole month of struggle before he could make the decision to renounce the world.

But after that month there was no more turning back. He emerged from the darkness a changed man. His raiment was torn and soiled, his face pale and haggard, so that people who met and had heard his father's story, jeered at him; and children flung mud and stones, crying "Pazzo! Pazzo!" as he passed.

We are told that his father ran out of his shop and laying hands on the youth thrust him with blows into the little cellar now built into the Chiesa Nuova, whence Lady Pica released him, braving her husband's wrath. Finally, Bernardone haled him before the Bishop, although he might surely have persisted in summoning his son before the consular court (unless we assume that Francis had already taken minor orders, which would seem a very temerarious assumption, in view of the fact that it is mentioned by none of the ecclesiastical biographers, for whom it would have had capital importance). Perhaps this bewildered and unhappy man hoped that the Bishop, rather than allow the youth to renounce his rich inheritance, would use his spiritual authority to control extravagances which were incomprehensible to himself; but the precipitancy of Francis's action took him by surprise and put him in the wrong. He had indulged his son's caprices as long as he desired to be a leader of revels or a knight, but to ask him now to acquiesce in this uncontrolled expenditure for restoring ruined churches, is surely to expect too much of this successful tradesman.

The famous scene occurred where to-day is the vestibule of the Bishop's palace near S. Maria Maggiore, which at that time served for the cathedral. The Bishop told Francis to restore the money which he had taken for his father's cloth, "since," he said, "that which is gained unjustly cannot be used for the Church."

He evidently intended that Francis should enter one of the religious orders, for he assured him that God would provide for his needs, if he surrendered his inheritance. Then suddenly, without warning, Francis did one of those characteristically dramatic things that confounded every one, friends and foes

alike ; he stripped off all his clothes and laid them at his father's feet. "Hear all of you what I have to say!" he cried. "Until now I have called Pietro Bernardone father ; but here I give him back his money and even the clothes that I have had of him ; so that henceforward I shall not say, My father Pietro Bernardone, but, Our Father, Which art in Heaven."

The crowd wept openly, as mediæval Italian crowds were apt to do. The Bishop wrapped the nakedness of Francis in his own mantle. Bernardone was probably stunned ; he picked up the little pile of garments and the purse of money and made ignominious exit from the stage of History.

II

We are not told how Francis eluded the hospitable intention of the Bishop. According to Thomas of Celano the latter was persuaded that the youth was moved by divine inspiration and that the act which he had witnessed had a mysterious significance. Francis was given food and a large rough peasant's tunic. St. Bonaventure records an important detail ; before he put it on he drew upon it the sign of the cross with a piece of chalk. He was a Crusader.

His more immediate intention seems to have been to go to the house of a friend in Gubbio, for by and by we find him hastening over the hills and dales and singing songs to the glory of God in the French tongue, as a minstrel to the glory of his lord. Tradition has it that his way to Gubbio lay by S. Fortunato ; if this be the case, he probably left the city by the old Roman Gate that is built into the cellars of the Palazzo Fiumi hard by the Confraternity of the Stigmata, followed the Via Fosso Edipo which led down from it to the Bridge of S. Vittorino over the Tescio, climbed up the opposite hill near a region known as Le Grotte on account of the cellars of the great Roman or Umbrian villas that are still to be found there, followed the crest of the ridge with its glorious views, passing the old oratory of S. Fortunato with its curious and much-venerated frescoes.

For the pilgrim who is a good walker with sufficient Italian to ask his way, there is nothing more delightful than to follow him, if possible as far as Gubbio ; but the distance from city to city is over twenty miles, though this is far the shortest and the loveliest road, and the Gubbio-Perugian omnibus can help with the last third part of it. To walk these ways to-day in

spring or early autumn is to come as near as humanly we can to realizing the joy that Francis found in the untrammelled life of wandering in which he had now embarked. It is here and thus that the pilgrim should consider it.

It is quite clear that he had no inclination towards the set life of a religious order, although one doubts if as yet this was entirely due to his desire for poverty. The revelation of the gospel life was to come later. What he shunned at this time was not so much the relative comfort of the convents as their security and confinement. His soul was set on freedom from all earthly trammels, on a life of miracle, of complete dependence upon God every day and every hour. He would go whereever directed, would rest in any cave, hovel or convent, feed at the Lord's table on such fare as was bestowed; his life should be no more dependent upon human foresight, but on Providence; the machinery of his world should be no longer human, but divine.

In his boyish dreams he had long dwelt in the land of knightly legend, in which men met with angels, with demons and wizards in fair human forms,—fantastic tales, but for Love's higher purposes a pilgrim's robe might veil an angel, or a leper's hideousness hide Love Himself. All the wonders of the Gospels would recur at the prayer of the least of God's servants, provided he possessed sufficient faith. This was to be his tremendous, his divine adventure.

According to tradition, Francis crossed the range at the point where his passing is still recorded by a wayside shrine with a fresco of his saint, St. John the Baptist, beckoning him and pointing to the background of Gubbio hills, above which is a vision of the Madonna. Thence he could see far below the towers of the village of Valfabbrica and the castles of Freddura and Biscina dominating the Chiascio gorge. So down through the woods he went, through the village, over the river by the old Roman bridge and along the farther bank below the frowning castles. Paved fragments of the path to-day prove it to have been an ancient road. The country is still like the background of an old tapestry; it must have been full of suggestion and delight. As Francis hurried through green woods in this month of April, beside the small streams fringed with poplars and the banks that were carpeted with flowers, he sang the songs of Provence that his mother Pica had taught him.

But his faith in this new world was soon to be put to trial. Some ten miles from Assisi, there is a lonely spot below the castle of Biscina where the path climbs up towards the old church of Caprignone, while the river Chiascio makes a sharp bend to the right, and to the left a wooded gorge comes down. Here, as tradition holds, a band of robbers stopped him; possibly outlaws or retainers of some neighbouring baron, who lived upon thefts and tolls exacted from travellers between Gubbio and Assisi. These ruffians laid hold on Francis, demanding who he might be. From his reply we may gauge his thoughts: "I am the Herald of the one Great King," he answered; "but what is that to you?"

His reply exasperated them; he was evidently a poor adherent of the priestly party. Stripping him of his tunic and casting him into a ditch wherein the snow still lay, "Lie there, thou fool herald of God!" they cried in mockery.

He picked himself up and, nearly naked, made his way up the hill to the left, towards Valingegno, to the old Benedictine convent of S. Verecondo. The place still stands to-day amid meadows on an eminence, a hundred yards below the Perugia-Gubbio road. To reach it from Caprignone must have taken Francis about an hour. After visiting the old church of Caprignone with its few faded frescoes of Plague Saints and its black Madonna, one can either return to the point where the road comes down from Biscina, or climb up by the little paths through fields and copses, from farm to farm, through a perfect cluster of charming glens to the high-road from Perugia above. Every spur is crowned with its castle or towered farm, every path is steep but beautiful, and the glorious view over the mountains of Gualdo gains at every step.

The Abbey of S. Verecondo, though much changed, yet bears some traces of its ancient origin. The quadrangle is now a farm-yard, the abbey-church restored, but one can still descend into the old crypt with its altar-tomb that still contains the bones of this early Christian Martyr. In Francis's day the Abbey must have been a place of wealth and dignity. It is ten miles from Gubbio by the driving road and about sixteen from Perugia.

At this abbey Francis as a beggar sought food, and was set to work in the kitchen. He remained a few days, fulfilling menial tasks, and, having earned no further raiment, set out once more upon his way to Gubbio, the path he took being

substantially the modern driving road. At Gubbio he was kindly received by his friend, whom tradition says was a certain noble, Federigo Spadalunga, whose house was situated where the fine thirteenth-century church of S. Francesco stands near the entrance to the city. Here he was clothed in the dress of an ordinary pilgrim, a grey tunic, a leathern belt and wallet, with shoes and a staff.

III

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Francis returned to Assisi, and while waiting for further guidance, resumed his interrupted task of restoring S. Damiano. This time, having no cloth or horse to sell, he begged for stones and enlisted others in what he doubted not was his Lord's business. "Who gives one stone shall have one reward, who gives two stones shall have two rewards, who gives three stones shall have three rewards," was his promise. Again as he went to beg he chanted in the Provençal tongue—the language of his knight-errantry. In days when men built their own houses, cut stone was a common article of trade and barter. The people were touched, they gave him the stones, and the progress of his work was a new proof to his faith that this was the true way to set about the matter.

But he perceived that this transfigurement of earth depended on his preservation of his soul's new-conquered freedom. When the priest of S. Damiano, in gratitude for the restoration of his chapel, gave him better fare, Francis, fearing lest he might be false to Poverty, took a dish into the city and begged food for himself from door to door. At first, the mess was difficult to swallow, even though seasoned by the good words of half the street. In after-years, when love and reverence may have induced the housewives to put aside the best they had for the Poverello, he would sprinkle ashes or water over his plate to make sure that Daintiness should not defile the Lady Poverty's door. "Sister Ash," Francis would say, "is so chaste in the mouth!" and the same he said of Sister Water.

It is most important to understand that fidelity to Poverty signified for Francis the negation of all desire for worldly honour or bodily comfort since thus alone was the soul's freedom to be secured. In short, Poverty was a spiritual attitude, not a material state. The external sacrifice was a mere symbol of the inward renunciation, which in turn was but death into spiritual life. It was not only a casting away of worldly encum-

brances for a career of liberty, it was a shedding of spiritual obstructions for the soul's union with God. Inability to realize this distinction was afterwards the cause of much misunderstanding between men of less exquisite spiritual sensibility.

Meanwhile to purse-proud Bernardone this begging of his first-born was insult added to humiliation. Henceforth for Francis his father's greeting was bitter malediction ; that of his friends and brothers mockery. He knelt to an aged beggar, called him father and entreated him to bless when the other cursed, and on one of his brethren saying to a friend in his hearing, " Go and ask Francis to sell us a drop of his sweat," Francis answered him in Provençal, their mother's language, " Nay, for I have sold it far more dearly to my Lord."

As to what Francis actually built, learned opinions differ. Some would have it that the peculiar pointed vaulting of the front part of the nave of S. Damiano is repeated in the other buildings he repaired, the Portiuncula, the little chapel at La Verna and the cell he occupied near Cortona, and that this peculiarity is only found at this date in the south of France ! It seems more probable that Francis did little more than restore a crumbling wall and roof with such skill as he may have acquired working at the city wall some ten years earlier ; after which he turned to the restoration of the apse of the convent church of S. Pietro, later destroyed by fire ; until finally he began to labour on a shrine whose history is at once so curious and so important that to trace it we must hark back several centuries.

CHAPTER V

The Portiuncula—St. Francis' Apostolacy—Bernard of Quintavalle —The First Companions—Their Method of Life—Pope Innocent III confirms the Rule.

I

IN the midst of the forest, some two miles from Assisi, for over a thousand years had stood a little building that was, perhaps, in pagan days a temple or a tomb. Four pilgrims from the Holy Land in the fourth century had adopted it, built a chapel on the site, sanctified it with a relic from Our Lady's sepulchre and called it " St. Mary of Jehosaphat." After the departure of the pilgrims it had been abandoned, though inhabited from time to time by hermits and visited constantly by Heavenly Guardians, from whose singing it had acquired a second name, " St. Mary of the Angels." Later, St. Benedict discovered its holiness and, acquiring for his followers the plot of land surrounding, called it " St. Mary of the Little Portion." St. Benedict probably added a house to the chapel, for his followers dwelt there for some six hundred years. They doubtless made the well and a cluster of little buildings, for to live so long in huts would have been to display a devotion to Poverty, which the followers of St. Benedict never even professed. But in the course of the twelfth century they too abandoned it for the relative security of the greater Abbey on the slopes of Mount Subasio above.

Tradition has it that the Lady Pica, led by prophetic insight, would often bring her little son to pray in this venerable place, but this would argue a condition of peace greater than one would expect. At any rate, it is probable that Francis knew it well, visible as it was from the city and less than a mile from the Lazaret, where he used to serve the lepers.

To the restoration of this little shrine Francis now betook

himself, using doubtless for the purpose stones from the adjoining ruins, among which he would find a well and shelter, for apart from the untrustworthy stories of the "Speculum Perfectionis," there is no evidence that Francis either at this time alone, or later with his companions, ever lived at the Portiuncula in huts of mud and brushwood. But he seems to have dwelt alone in his isolated ruin, following in their literal sense the words he had heard before the crucifix at S. Damiano, until by the spring of 1209 the restoration of the chapel was completed and Mass once more was occasionally said in it, perhaps by the priest of S. Damiano, perhaps by some monk of S. Pietro or S. Benedetto, to whose house the whole forest belonged. Then all at once a new revelation came to Francis in the Gospel for the feast of St. Mathias, read in the chapel of the Portiuncula:

"Go ye to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and as ye go, preach, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses; nor scrip for your journey, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat."

"This," cried Francis, "is what I have been seeking; this is what I long for with my whole heart!" He cast off his shoes and flung away his staff. No longer was his garment to be merely marked with a cross, it was to be fashioned like a cross in itself, and instead of his leathern belt he girt himself with a rope, as a knight of Christ and of his Lady Poverty. Thus clothed, thus girt, thus ordered and inspired, he passed up through the wood to begin his new apostolacy. To all whom he met upon the road he gave the greeting, "Brothers, may the Lord give you His peace."

In the early thirteenth century in any Central Italian city a lay-preacher was by no means an unusual sight. He generally preached repentance, denouncing the wealth and apathy of the priests and Orders, or the greed and injustice of the magistrates. His doctrine was not seldom tainted with the prevailing heresies. Often he wore a peculiar dress, which illustrated his teaching and attracted the attention of the crowd. If the Bishop or the Consuls did not speedily suppress him, his mission not infrequently terminated amid general contumely in the city ditch.

The apostolacy of Francis was different. He did not denounce any classes or powers, nor anyone in particular. His sermons contained no doctrine and no dangerous disputes. He spoke rather of the love of Christ, the Heavenly Treasure, the beauty of the Lady Poverty and of his vision of the world, which came to him as the guerdon of her service. When he lamented men's blindness and distraction, he touched upon their weaknesses with charity and charm. His gentle bearing and his simple dress disarmed by their humility; his life's history, known to every one, proved that he was sincere.

But apart from natural curiosity excited by this new appearance of rich Bernardone's son, there is no reason to suppose that at this period his preaching had any success. But what his discourses lacked in popularity they gained in deep persuasion.

Amongst those who listened to him was a certain rich Assisan noble, Bernard of Quintavalle, who must have known him from his boyhood, for his palace stands hard by the house of Bernardone. But Bernard in life and character sharply contrasted with the gay son of the cloth-merchant, for he was a serious, religious man, a civic magistrate, at least ten years older than Francis, and averse to vanities and follies. Moreover, his motive for leaving the world appears very different, inasmuch as while Francis, so full of life, had found in wealth and luxury walls that imprisoned and shut him out from the fuller life of the spirit, Bernard in his sobriety and reserve had probably never felt the lure of the world at all. Silently he had noted the deep change in Francis and wondered if here were not a cure for his own dissatisfaction. He invited the younger man to his house, to share his chamber, and feigned sleep to watch him. By the dim light of a perpetual lamp burning before a sacred picture, he saw him leave his bed and kneel night-long in ecstasy. Convinced, he made his choice and abandoned wealth and worldly dignities.

One may see to-day his door, narrow, round-arched, stained by time, with its few steps down into the cobbled street. Within is perhaps the very chamber of decision.

Meanwhile another man was drawn to Francis, Peter Cataneo, a lay canon, or doctor of laws. In the early morning the three went together to their parish church of St. Nicholas, in order to consult the Gospel.

This church stood at the western end of the modern Piazza,

but was destroyed by an earthquake at the beginning of the nineteenth century; the ruins were pulled down and a building erected that only yesterday made way for the Post Office. All that remains is the crypt, which can be entered by a large door from the Via Portica. The foundations of the church evidently rested upon walls of Etruscan masonry; the round vaults of the crypt are supported by two central pillars, consisting of great fluted drums of ancient columns, resembling the columns of the neighbouring temple of the Minerva, their capitals being the ancient bases reversed.

Francis was anxious to strengthen the purpose of his companions, and after prayer opened the book of the Gospels, which lay upon the altar for all men to read. The verse that met their eyes at the first opening was from St. Matthew: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven, and come and follow Me!" At the second opening they read the following from St. Luke: "And He said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor scrip; neither bread, nor money; neither have two coats apiece." The third opening brought them once more to St. Matthew: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and let him take up his cross and follow Me." "This," cried Francis, "is our life and rule, for ourselves and for all who will join our company."

The selling of Bernard's possessions must have made a great stir in the town; the distribution attracted a large crowd. Doubtless many undeserving persons were enriched and fierce passions of envy and greed excited. A priest, Sylvester, complained to Francis that he had not been paid adequately for certain stones he had brought for S. Damiano. Francis gave him handfuls of coin from Bernard's bag and Sylvester departed ashamed, to join the sons of Poverty himself a few weeks later.

So the nobleman and the learned canon found themselves sheltering with Francis, the mad Troubadour, amid ruins of the old Benedictine house attached to the little chapel of St. Mary of the Angels. After a week they were joined by Giles (that is Egidio)—a husbandman who made up by shrewdness and ready wit whatever he lacked in learning. He was afterwards a great traveller and a greater mystic, who to the glory of the Order was once rapt to the Third Heaven like St. Paul

THE HOUSE OF BERNARD OF QUINTAVALLE AT ASSISI

Francis received him as a knight of God and took him to Assisi to procure a garment like his own, which shows that there was already an established dress for the Order. Soon came in quick succession Sabbatino, Morico, John of the Hat; then Philip the Tall, John of S. Costanza, Barbero, Bernard of Vigilanzio; then Sylvester, who was the first priest to join them. Later Francis, passing through Rieti, called a certain noble knight, Angelo Tancredi, who left his house, his horse and arms for a life of wandering service, to be handed down to posterity as a paragon of courtesy.

II

It cannot be sufficiently insisted that St. Francis never desired his order to consist of idle men, who reduced their standard of living to a minimum in order that they might adopt a life of wandering. Devotion to Poverty was ordained to free, not their bodies from labour, but their souls from sordid desire. It was to be a poverty of the spirit, a not-desiring to possess, which, according to the promise of the Master, signified the participation in the Kingdom. For his simple necessities a friar was to work, each according to his trade, or, if he had no trade, he was to learn one.

The conditions of country life in Umbria, even to-day, make possible a vagrant life of casual labour. The peasants are kindly hospitable folk, more so perhaps than the inhabitants of the towns, and whereas the land with its great and successive variety of crops demands unceasing work, the harvests generally yield such abundance of rough food, that any willing, stalwart labourer can even at the poorest farm make sure of a meal of maize polenta or dried beans, with olive oil, a salad of herbs, a piece of bread, perhaps some cheese and a glass of thin brown wine. All that would be usually required is courtesy and goodwill. But if in addition to these essential qualities there were added the charm of a song or a good story, then indeed the guest would be made welcome.

In Franciscan days such hospitality must have been far more common than to-day. Imagine the pilgrims pouring down to Rome from all parts of central and northern Europe, the knights and soldiers, bound for some crusade, the minstrels, the pedlars and merchants. How many footsore stragglers, victims of fever, sickness, sunstroke, dropped from their fellows; how many were robbed or lost their way overtaken

by nightfall in the forests, or found their money failed them before they reached their goal!

In Francis's time the country-folk lived in small feudal villages with quarters for men, women or married couples, and sheds for the animals, the whole surrounded by a stout wall with towers for defence in case of need. Often, no doubt, large numbers of people messed together, so that an extra bowl of food would not appreciably diminish the contents of the common pot, whereas a song, a story or a sermon would be a definite contribution to the interest of the day.

So Francis and his seven or his twelve companions slept together in huts, in tombs, in caves or shelters; at dawn, after singing the Paternoster, setting forth in pairs in various directions, to work, sing, preach and pray in the towns and villages of the neighbourhood, to dine with whoever would give them food, and possibly to carry something back for a community supper at night. Sometimes Francis would send them farther afield on longer missions, and frequently for days or weeks he and a chosen comrade would disappear into some lonely cave among the hills for solitary communion with God. Throughout his life he sought such periods of solitude, that often were long agonies of self-distrust and self-abasement, or ecstasies of faith and thankfulness. At times he would lament his own unworthiness; at times he would be filled with a miraculous illumination, when the horizons of his mind were enlarged and he foresaw the future greatness of his Order.

But not unnaturally this spreading of the movement created a reaction both by its worldly consequences and its spiritual challenge. Relatives of those who had bestowed their possessions on the poor objected to the impoverishment of their families. Lords and dependents alike were injured. Why should this mad son of Bernardone turn everything upside down? Ecclesiastics looked askance at the new enthusiasts; was there not sufficient heresy already? Civic authorities suspected another element of possible disorder; were there not beggars enough without these stalwart vagrants? Serious men of substance shook their heads at the new folly; was it to be allowed to impoverish the town? Women, often the allies of such movements, ran away from men of such unkempt appearance; might not such madmen cast a spell? Citizens generally resented that these well-to-do young men, having

given away their own property, should look to them for support. At many doors they were refused; when Francis came to preach in the city he was received with insults.

Good Bishop Guido made a last effort to get him to compromise with common sense, to combine with some recognized religious house, to have some fixed home or convent for his Order. "Your way of living without possessions seems to me very hard and painful," he concluded. "But if we have goods," objected Francis, "we must have arms to protect them, for it is from possessions that come quarrels with one's neighbours, injurious to the love of God and men; that is why we are absolutely decided to own nothing in this world." So Francis wrote a brief Rule in this sense, drawn up in simple language, and determined to submit it to Innocent the Pope.

III

Before they set out upon their journey, Francis insisted that the little band should elect one of their number, not himself, to be its leader. It is interesting to note that the choice fell upon Bernard of Quintavalle, a man of prudence, and that it was not made by lot. Their road lay down the valley past Spoleto, up into the highlands by the lovely little Lake of Piedeluco, and across the plateau of Rieti, which afterwards Francis grew to love so well. Thence it descended into the hot Campagna and so over that desolate land to Rome, where they lodged in the Hospital of St. Anthony, not far from the Lateran, and close to the Church of Sta. Maria Maggiore. The chapel of this Hospital still exists. For most of these provincial men the journey in their strange, rough garb, barefoot, without money or provisions, must have been a wild adventure, practicable only under the especial providence of God. We are told that all the way they found kindly folk to feed them, and once on their return journey when hungry in a desert—probably the Campagna—a fair young man suddenly appeared who gave them loaves and straightway vanished, comforting them less by the much-needed nourishment than by the signal proof of heavenly goodwill. Moreover, on the way to Rome Francis saw in a dream a mighty Tree, to the summit of which he was lifted so as to be able to bend it to the ground.

Nevertheless, their first reception at the Papal Court was ominous. Innocent was preoccupied with his great schemes

and dismissed Heaven's eager little herald curtly. But fortunately Bishop Guido of Assisi was at that crisis in Rome, and he introduced the penitents to the Cardinal Bishop of St. Sabina, a man of holy life and spiritual comprehension, who recognized the earnestness that inspired the little band. Having, like all the others, vainly tried to persuade them to join some established Order, he obtained for them another Papal audience.

To the Pope and his court Francis explained the rule of life he and his comrades wished to follow, asking no more than leave to possess nothing, provide nothing, resist nothing, and preach nothing but the pure love of Christ. The Cardinals thought this Rule too hard for anyone, and according to their human wisdom they were right. But the Bishop of Sabina had a superhuman argument, that Cardinals could not very well gainsay. "If we refuse the petition of this poor man, when all he asks is that the Gospel life may be sanctioned for him and his followers, let us beware lest we stumble at the Gospel. For if any man say that in the observance of the Gospel there is anything untried, or contrary to reason or in any way impossible, he is clearly blaspheming against Christ, its Author." So Francis was dismissed while they debated.

Recalled into the presence-chamber, he had a parable to tell them which had been "given" to him while he prayed outside. It was the parable of a poor woman wedded by a King for her exceeding beauty, who by and by sent him his sons to be brought up at the Royal Table, having no fear but that he would accept them, because of their resemblance to himself. The King was Christ, the Royal Table Charity, the sons of Poverty were made in His likeness through the power of the Spirit.

The Pontiff listened with amazement to this strange troubadour. It appeared that he also had dreamed dreams.

There is no element in the Franciscan story so curious to our modern minds and so characteristic of the mediæval as the constant report of premonitory dreams. Francis is fired in youth by a chivalric dream of his father's shop ablaze with glittering armour, which he is told is for himself and for his soldiers. At Spoleto he is turned back from his secular emprise by voices that speak to him in dreams. Sylvester is eventually brought to join the first companions by a dream

of Francis with a great cross of gold proceeding from his mouth—and then we have the dream of the great Tree to whose summit Francis at this critical moment clung.

But of all the miraculous dreams in the Franciscan story none is more strange than that of Innocent, who dreamed that he saw the Lateran falling, when a little man stepped forward and propped it with his back.

That the great Pope in the night watches must at times have been distressed in mind, in spite of the success of his vast plans for the extension of his authority; that his soul may have yearned for an awakening of the Spirit under the gorgeous panoply of wealth and power with which he and his predecessors had clothed the Church; that he may have seen the perils of a growing formalism, the stiffening of hieratic copes for the very weight of jewels; all this is more than probable. But that any man after the first decade of that great theocratic century should have presented to the imagination of posterity the huge hierarchic structure of the Catholic Church under the symbol of a tottering basilica, argues a daring spiritual vision, piercing beneath the earthly show.

For if the thirteenth century marks the apogee of papal power, it is certain that by the year 1210 were already laid the chief foundations of that great dominion. Twelve years of Innocent's rule had already brought nearly all Christendom to his feet. The chief defender of the Albigensian heretics, Raymond of Toulouse, had but a year before been forced to penance, thus proving that the Crusades had put in papal hands a sword that could henceforth be turned equally against Moslems and Christian heretics, recalcitrant emperors, like Otho, or contumacious kings, like John of England. The great Italian cities had been leagued together in an alliance, against which even the energy of Frederick II was to batter itself in vain. Before the death of Innocent, only six years later, the kings of Portugal, Leon, Castile, Navarre, Bohemia, Hungary and Bulgaria had been warned or punished; the King of Denmark had been comforted; the King of France had been forced to take back his banished wife; the King of Aragon had come to Rome to swear allegiance; the King of England had done homage for his realm; even an Eastern Emperor had been crowned by a Latin Legate! From Iceland to Armenia the great Pope's hand was felt, his spiritual and temporal thunders dreaded.

But the danger to the stability of the Lateran lay not in its columns, the kings and hierarchies, but in its foundations, the common laity, which everywhere were being sapped by the stealthy pervasion of heresy. To sanction a new wandering Order was a risk; it might only add to the rebels. But apparently the movement was already going forward and so far directed by the Church. Should it be drawn into control or permitted to join the enemy? It might form a compromise with the new spirit and attract to itself many of those who were trying to return to first principles without guidance. By means of a Rule it might be led as by a bridle; so the Penitents received the "narrow tonsure" and straightway returned to Assisi.

CHAPTER VI

Rivo-Torto—The Gift of the Portiuncula—Some of the First Brothers —" The Perfect Joy."

I

THE slopes and glens below S. Damiano offer a wealth of interest and beauty to all who will brave their stony little paths. For the paths often follow immemorial roadways; stretches are paved with ancient Umbrian flagstones; the bordering fields are rich with relics of the past. In every bank one discovers fragments of Roman masonry; in every eminence one suspects the foundations of a Roman villa; in every towered farm a mediæval fortress; in every shed a desecrated chapel; in every tank a tomb. Drums of old temple columns serve for boundary or corner stones; strips of some carven frieze form lintels or well-worn steps; in every other cottage one can trace a Gothic arch, a Gothic window; for the whole land is a palimpsest of the handiwork of countless generations. To human labour Nature has responded in varied wealth of beauty; in sycamores and oaks; in poplars by the streams; in fig-trees with their fine, clear boughs, their fresh green leaves and luscious fruit; in endless garlands of the vine; in bright flowers on wall and bank, in field and hedge and glen. Not the least charm of the land is its courteous, dark-eyed peasantry tilling the unexhausted soil with their strong white oxen by methods that are probably oldest of all.

Thus one may wander down to the tall church of Rivo-Torto, erected to take the place of an older building destroyed by earthquake in the middle of the last century, when plaster painted to look like marble was admired. The somewhat frigid edifice protects a little shrine, reputed to contain the shell of the tiny refuge in which the new Order sheltered during the winter succeeding its return from Rome. But this tradition is not always now accepted, in spite of the obvious " Winding

Stream" hard by. It is just possible, though not probable, that the "Hut of Rivo-Torto" may have been nearer to the leper settlements, which clustered round the little chapels of Sta. Maria Maddalena and S. Rufino d'Arce. It is as well to make sure by visiting these also. They may be reached in a quarter of an hour along the high-road from Rivo-Torto, or straight down from the Porta Moiano. The Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene stands just off the road at the point where the railway crosses it. It has a tiny apse like that of the Portiuncula and two round arches of pre-Gothic days. When last we entered, it was encumbered by old wooden ploughs, ladders and spades; but the peasants averred that it was used for Mass occasionally. The Chapel of S. Rufino d'Arce is about a hundred yards behind it, a somewhat later shrine perhaps, for its arches have slight ogival point, albeit this as a builder's trick means little, since it was used occasionally long before the introduction of the pointed style marked a period in architecture. The peasants will show a well here wherein a youth was cast for refusing to tell a lie. His body was found long afterwards with a lily growing from his mouth and on the petals could be read the word "Veritas." The water became thenceforward a cure for sundry maladies; the chapel serves to-day as a repository for grain.

If the site of the hut be uncertain, yet we know it was so small that Francis had to write the brothers' names over their places, to avoid their disturbing one another in the night-season, when one or other would go forth to pray. Their fare was so poor at this time that they often had to stay their hunger with mangels, food of beasts, begged from the neighbouring peasants. One night they were aroused by the cries of a young brother who thought he was dying, so faint was he for lack of food. Francis arose, and gathering together whatever fragments he could find, sat down to a meal with the youth, lest he should be ashamed to eat alone. Then he forbade the Brothers to fast excessively.

Such food as they had the Brothers earned by work, especially in the fields. In winter-time, however, there was less labour needed and the number of the Brothers was considerable. It was a favourite task with them to tend the lepers in the neighbouring settlement, but in view of the abandonment of these unfortunates by the world, it is doubtful if much food could be earned by this service. When work there was none, the

Brothers would beg, which was often for the novice the most difficult of duties; but begging, tending lepers, labouring in the fields or at the most menial household duty, they prized the task just in proportion as it brought a humbling of the natural man, or constraining of shrinking flesh.

Their orisons were of the simplest; they possessed no office book. They recited the Paternoster together at the canonical hours, chanting it to a spiritual melody. To each petition Francis added a rhapsodical paraphrase, closing with a few antiphonal verses that recall the Benedicite. But the Brothers would remain on their knees for long periods, rapt in ardent contemplation or continuous intercession "of the heart rather than of the lips." They meditated day and night upon the Cross of Christ; if flesh failed the less accustomed Brother, he would often school himself to fight off sleep with such instruments of self-torture as the zeal of his impatient spirit could invent. Not that Francis approved of such expedients; once at a great Chapter, learning that many friars were wearing iron shirts of mail or rings for penance or suppression of the flesh, he ordered such as wore them by Holy Obedience to take them off and lay them down before him. We are told that they made a mighty heap.

As for their prayers, the little ritual that Francis taught the Brothers was of such singular simplicity compared with the sonorous pomp of the monastic Breviary, that it almost suggests the intention of applying literally the words of Christ to His Disciples with regard to vain repetitions and much speaking. The Brothers undoubtedly practised at this period what mystics call the Prayer of Quiet, especially in lonely cells and caves upon the mountains; for such prayer seemed to Francis "a sharing of the life of angels, a union with the Highest Good, a storing-up of graces," while preaching was a giving out of the gifts received from Heaven. What Francis needed for himself he prescribed for his companions; it is characteristic of him that he shared his spiritual opportunities as generously as his wealth when he was still in the world.

Thus in these first days of the Order the possibility of the Gospel life was proved triumphantly. It became no longer a matter of historical assertion, but of actual experiment. Its conditions were an ardent faith sufficient for all miracles; a poverty of spirit pure enough to accept the humblest susten-

ance; obedience ready to submerge the individual will completely; and charity to love all in God and to prefer all others' interests to one's own.

The pomps of the world, moreover, were of no account to these men who had given up its glories. While they were dwelling in this hut, the Emperor Otho IV passed by with feudal chivalry. Wherever he went, he "punished" the recalcitrant cities, which preferred their liberty under the nominal protection of the Pope to the tyranny of his German viceroys. The pathway of the Emperor was invariably strewn with the ruins of farms and convents, for in the memory of such acts of terrorism alone consisted the shadow of the authority he claimed. Francis was neither daunted by the calculated cruelty nor attracted by the arrogant display. The little community remained indoors, chanting their simple office, save one, sent out as an ambassador to announce to the proud but superstitious monarch the imminence of his fall from power and his inglorious death.

Probably by reason of their very sacrifices and hardships, borne so gratefully, much superhuman grace and power was granted. Had there been any shadow of insincerity in their manifest happiness, as they went singing through a scoffing world, their success could not possibly have been so great nor their Order have been beset by thousands, eager to share its privations and its rewards. That there were great rewards, not only of inward grace but of outward wonders, is proved, one might say by their endurance and success; for no man would suffer gladly a life of such discomfort for the sake of deceiving the world regarding it!

For example, we are told that one night Francis was absent from them, preaching in Assisi, actually sheltering in a tiny cavern, now a chapel, that you may still see in the garden of the canons of the cathedral. Of the Brothers down on the plain in their little hovel at Rivo-Torto some were sleeping and some were praying silently, after the manner that Francis taught them, when suddenly by the door there entered a shining image as of a fiery chariot of marvellous brightness, with a ball of fire above it, which turned three times about the building, waking the sleepers, astounding the watchers, and filling them all with a glow of spiritual light. In the mind of each sprang the assurance that though their father might be absent, yet in the spirit he was always with them,

and that their eyes had thus been opened to his presence through his prayers.

II

One almost feels that until the Brothers were expelled from their shelter at Rivo-Torto by the discourtesy of a countryman who drove his mule into their midst one night, Francis was keeping away from the most fitting home for his little Order, lest his too ardent love for it should be a treachery to Poverty. For all the time not a mile and a half away was the once more deserted Chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, which he had restored by his own labour and wherein he had received the message that formed the inspiration of his apostolacy. The Abbot of St. Benedict now gave it to him for his asking, and Francis or his Brethren paid as yearly fee a netful of fish and a flask of oil, which they still give to-day. So here in the midst of the waste the Brothers built their wooden or wattle huts amid the walls of the Benedictine ruins, replanting the forsaken garden and orchard and running a quickset hedge around to set it apart as holy. For as time went on and the Brethern increased, Francis would not allow them all or the visitors who came to see them to enter the holy place at will, but only those of perfect life and proved devotion. These night and day continued in prayer and adoration, which no worldly converse was permitted to disturb. About the beloved chapel gleamed an aureole of vision, as already around the person of the Founder. It was seen in a dream to be surrounded by vast crowds struck with blindness, crying and stretching out their hands to it, when suddenly a light from heaven descended on it and their sight and their salvation were restored. So was the heart of each Brother comforted and endurance strengthened, as every watch brought forth new wonders and every new adherent added his torch of faith to the beacon radiating thence across the world.

In the Legend of the Three Companions a picture of their life is given, which we should like to quote at an indefinite length. The great embarrassment of the narrator of these stories is that he has to retell and compress that which has been written in immortal language.

"Eager were the Brothers to pray and work that they might be kept far from indolence, the enemy of the soul. In the night season

they arose and prayed devoutly with profound sighs and tears. They loved one another with a cordial love, and served each other, and one man gave another bread as a mother feeds her only and beloved son. Such love burned in them that it seemed a light thing to them to give their bodies up to death, not only for the love of Christ, but for the saving of the souls and bodies of their brethren.

"Ever prepared for obedience in all things, they gave themselves up continually to the will of him that had command over them, making no nice distinction between just and unjust commands; for whatsoever was commanded they held to be God's will, and to do His will was easy and sweet to all.

"No one kept anything for himself; but the books and other things given them they used in common, according to the rule handed down by the Apostles. In their poverty they were gay, for they had no desire after riches, but despised all worldly things that are dear to lovers of this world."

What marvellous glimpses into human holiness we get from watching these simple men moving around the clear light of their saintly Leader and thus made visible to us adown the ages! The ray of Francis revealed not only Nature but Humanity to the hard eyes of an inhuman world. Bernard was afflicted with doubts of his own constancy; Bernard, the rich nobleman, the dignified city father; Bernard, the wanderer in solitary mountains, the lover of free air and open spaces, where he sought for God. It was like his serious humility to distrust himself. See him first suffering every humiliation at Bologna, while the crowd throw mud and the boys hang on to his hood behind, and then finally running away from the growing reverence of the population,—Bernard of Quintavalle, who had been brought up to honour! Peter Cattaneo was afflicted with considerations of worldly prudence; he could not step out so boldly upon the sea of miracle as Francis; after all, had he not been a lawyer? Rufino, the shy mystic, the terror of demons, who longed for a life of solitary prayer, was beset by all manner of devilish delusions, such as distrust of Francis, or dread that all his works and prayers were idle, since he was predestined to damnation. It was he who, to overcome his shame, was sent to preach in the city, naked save for his breeches, to be derided by the crowd, until Francis, repenting of his severity, ran up in like condition and, mounting the pulpit beside him, proved that fervour can annul indignity and draw tears in place of ridicule, long before panting Leo arrived with the two habits on his arm! All

these three men were important persons in their city, men, as they say, with the whole world at their feet.

Look at the noble Angelo Tancredi, the gentlest and most courteous knight in the world, a "real" knight, so to speak, before he became a knight of Poverty and one of the most loyal of the comrades of Francis and the sharer with him of the most wondrous mysteries. Then Leo, "the Pecorello" or "little Sheep of God," the exquisite penman, as the Breviaries he made for Francis and Clare show to our wondering admiration; the secretary of the Saint and his confessor. Or Pacifico, once William of Lisciano, the King of Verses, who had been brought as a youth by an Emperor to the gay court of Palermo; had bandied ballads, love-songs, sonnets in contest with Norman and Provençal troubadours; had listened to fine-spun, courtly disquisitions, dialectics of learned Greek and Arabs with their subtle science; had taken part in Courts of Love and finally had been crowned laureate by the great Frederick himself,—watch him, training his ear to rhythms of a ruder but sincerer inspiration and setting the rough lines of a new Lord of Song to melodies reminiscent of the airs of Sicily! For he had seen Francis crucified upon two crossed swords, and glorious with the mystic Tau in fire on his forehead; and were these not greater signs to follow than the insignia of Kings?

Then Masseo, the tall, eloquent and comely, whom Francis ordered to be doorkeeper, almoner and cook, to teach him that Obedience is sister of Humility, and naught to do with the justice or injustice of commands—look at Masseo turning round and round until he falls from giddiness, in order to decide which road the Brothers are to take! Juniper, too, that most successful imitator of children, who kept a crowd of noble Romans waiting in scandalized impatience for his sermon, while he danced up and down, shouting with laughter, bare legs dangling, playing at see-saw by the City Gate with two happy ragged boys! Then there is Giles, the ubiquitous traveller, the industrious Jack-of-all-trades; the shrewdest, wittiest Seer of God that the saintly records show,—weeping because a priest that he begged from answered him that he was an idle good-for-nothing and priests cannot utter a lie! Was it the same Giles who afterwards refused his prayers to the two splendid Cardinals, because they must have so much greater hope than he, since they with their wealth, their

honours and their friends, yet hoped to be saved, while he with his poverty still feared he might be damned?

How full of great adventures was the strange spiritual game! A marvellous insight into its rules and objects is given in the famous definition of "the Perfect Joy." The scene of the parable was the road between Perugia and the Portiuncula, at the point where there is a curve north-eastward to avoid the little hill called Collestrada, whereon to-day stands a church with a tall campanile amid cypresses and umbrella pines. Francis was trudging after Leo, tired and footsore, suffering extremely from the bitter cold. For two miles as they trudged, coming from the old bridge at S. Giovanni over the Tiber, Francis discoursed on what the perfect joy was not, where it was not to be found: neither if the Friars Minor in all lands should give examples of holiness, nor if they should give sight to the blind, hearing and speech to the deaf and dumb, or raise the dead to life; nor if they should know all tongues and sciences and be able to reveal the secrets of the future, of the conscience and of the soul; nor if they should speak with the tongues of angels and know the courses of the stars, the qualities of birds, of fishes, of all animals and of man, of trees and herbs, of stones and roots and waters; no, not even if they should so preach as to convert all infidels to Christ; not in all these would perfect joy be found. But rather, if, when they two should come to the Portiuncula, wet through with the rain, frozen with cold, foul with mire and tormented with hunger, and knock at the door, the porter should come out and abuse them, beat them with a big knotted stick and bruise their every bone, and they, thinking on the agony of Christ, should bear all these sufferings patiently and gratefully for love of Him, then here and in this should be the Perfect Joy!

CHAPTER VII

The Coming of St. Clare.

AT this point we come to one of the sweetest and most delicate flowers of the garland of Franciscan story, but one that is not seldom wilted by the hot hand of the sentimentalist, or dressed up into conventional insignificance in a clerical bouquet.

Clare "of the Conti Scefi" was noble, rich and beautiful; at this time she was eighteen years of age. Surrounded by her affectionate family, admiring friends and suitors, with her servants, her dresses and jewels, she was probably as much envied by the ordinary girls as had been the gay son of Bernardone by the youths. But Clare was soon sated with the pleasure of pretty clothes and easy conquests, as he had wearied of his worldly gauds. She looked below and above the superficial: down into the sufferings of the poor that would not let her rest from sympathy; and upwards into the joys of faith that would not let her rest from aspiration. But above all, it is the splendid strength, the dauntless will, with which she ensued her vision and achieved her purpose, that makes her deed almost unique in history.

Her instruction was in reading, writing and fine needlework; her education in sermons, alms-giving and knightly tales. But there was no tint of sensuous romance in the white radiance of her determined spirit; her life's adventure was a ringing challenge to the sensuous world. By declaring a vocation to her spiritual director she might have received an embroidered veil from episcopal hands with ceremony and in a few years have come to rule the dignified domain of a great convent; but hearing a little barefoot friar eagerly preaching poverty, she caught a glimpse of her ideal of absolute renouncement, and determined to break with her whole world in order to attain it.

Though little more than a child, she acted with decision;

sent messages, saw Francis secretly—clandestinely, one had almost said—like any bold love-smitten maid; proved her vocation at his bidding by begging, clad in sackcloth; unbarred by night a secret door, blocked up with beams and heavy stones; and without a backward glance or farewell kiss, even for her mother Ortolana or her sister Agnes, stepped out into the world of spiritual adventure.

The house in which she lived is the last you reach before you emerge into the piazza of her name; that is to say, as you go from the central square it is the last on the right before the arch that marks the old line of the walls, or, as you go up the lower road past Sta. Maria Maggiore, it is the last on the left before the vault spans the street. Here you may see a little pointed doorway, out of which, tradition holds, Clare passed that night when she left her parents' dwelling. In ancient Umbrian houses special doors were made for the exposing and the passage of the bodies of those who died within; no living being used them. Dying to the world, for Clare to leave her father's palace by the door of Death would seem a piece of symbolism characteristic of St. Francis.

A few steps brought her to a city gate, the Porta Moiano, whence the little path ran steeply, much as it does to-day; at any rate it could hardly have been stonier. Being the night after the Feast of Palms, the moon would have set early; hurrying down, within an hour she reached the Portiuncula. The Friars, their matins said, came out into the woods with torches to meet her; at their humble altar she took her vows and on it as a token left her long bright braids of hair.

At dawn she was escorted to the Benedictine convent at Bastia, or Isola Romanica, as it then was called, being almost surrounded by a marsh, near the confluence of the Tescio and the Chiascio. In the nuns' little church the neophyte took sanctuary, and when on the morrow her relatives reclaimed her, clung to the altar and declared her irrevocable determination and the vows in which she had embodied it, until her cousins, from respect of these, or knowledge of her character, desisted from the sacrilegious strife.

In the turbulent years of the next centuries, this convent was turned into a fortress; subsequently the marsh was drained and the towers were pulled down. Now the site of the convent and the castle is the village burying-place; but

THE CONVENT OF ST. DAMIANO

the church in the old cypress grove has still its ancient apse and a suitable inscription, for of all its chequered history this battle of St. Clare's is the only one remembered.

After a few weeks she was moved to the little convent of St. Angelo di Panzo, situated to the south-east of Assisi, on the edge of the stony torrent-bed that runs down from the Carceri gorge. The remains of this house have been built into a farm and may still be visited by the curious, for they were soon the scene of another similar conflict, when Clare was joined by her sister, Agnes, and a new attempt was made to force her back into the world. At the cries of the younger girl Clare fell upon her knees, whereupon it is said that the body of the helpless Agnes became miraculously immovable and thus the assailants were obliged to let her be. So the second victory was even more decisive than the former, proclaiming as it did the folly of obstructing the manifest will of God. Thereafter the fame of the "Poor Ladies" grew inordinately and many noble maids were drawn to Francis's Second Order.

In later times, one feels that Clare would have founded an order of missionaries and gone forth to convert the world to Christ. We are told that when the first friars were martyred in Morocco, she could scarcely be restrained by Francis from setting out to seek the palm in Paynim lands. But she was destined to shed abroad a radiance of chastity and holiness, to correspond with holy queens like Agnes of Bohemia and Elizabeth of Hungary, to comfort saints like Francis, Anthony and Leo, to give counsel to Popes and Cardinals, Gregory, Urban and Innocent, to save her city from the Saracens of excommunicated Frederick—all from her narrow prison of S. Damiano.

At this exquisite little convent, now made ready and extended for her by Francis and his Brothers, you may see her choir to the right of the central altar and the place where once was the grating, her window towards the world; you may visit the brown, low-vaulted refectory where at a Pope's bidding she blessed the loaves and a cross appeared upon them; her little garden, whence from between her few much-loved flowers she could lean out and look down on the Portiuncula; her oratory with its simple relics, her cord, her bell, her breviary, written for her so exquisitely by the hand of Brother Leo; her dormitory, with the very doorway whence she defied the Saracen, and

the wooden cross on the floor that marks the spot where she fought with death until the Bull came that confirmed the poverty of her convent. The place is not so much a reliquary as a single relic, preserved to-day almost unchanged after nearly seven centuries.

CHAPTER VIII

The Island in Lake Trasimene where Francis fasted—The Hermitage of Sarteano—The Hermitage of the Carceri and its Legends—Other Hermitages.

I

THE more the Brothers looked to Francis, the more closely was he united to them in spirit and the more intimately and lovingly did he read their inmost thoughts; his love for them gave him an infinite tact, enabling him to conquer their faults and to overcome for them their temptations. But such substitution is of all mystical activities the most exhausting of spiritual power, and Francis was compelled, as even his Master had been before him, to seek the refreshment of entire solitude.

To follow his footsteps we must leave the immediate neighbourhood of Assisi and watch him spending the Lenten fast on an uninhabited island in Lake Trasimene. From the Portiuncula he had made his way across the Perugian mountains to Cortona, where he had converted a noble and wealthy youth called Guy, who with him for a few weeks inhabited two little caves in the bank of a torrent on the far side of that city, where later Elias built the Hermitage of "Le Celle." Then he was inspired to spend the Fast in solitude and persuaded a boatman to row him over to the large barren island, which we see swelling up like the back of a huge whale out of the placid water of the lake. The man was to say no word to anyone for forty days, but to come for him again on Holy Thursday. Francis took with him two small loaves, and, landing on the eastern shore of the island at a spot that is marked to-day by a small ruined chapel, he built himself a hut a little higher up towards the right, where another chapel stands amid the brushwood and small trees.

To-day the boatmen add a few curious traditions to the legend: one that when their forerunner refused to carry Francis over to the island because of a raging storm, the

latter produced a lighted taper which he held upright and unprotected in the wind; whereupon the man took heart and they reached the island safely, "because the taper even in that storm could never be put out!" Nevertheless the saint seems to have some difficulty in the landing; for another story tells of his clinging to a rock and leaving the impression of his hands and body upon it, as it yielded him shelter from the dashing of the waves.

Storms rise up over the lake with great rapidity; in an open rowing boat even with three or four rowers it may take an hour and more on the rough water to get back from the island over the little strait; in winter the islanders are often cut off for weeks together. But the excursion from Passignano is delightful on a windless day.

After St. Francis's death, the Friars made a hermitage upon the island; a century later the city of Perugia built them at the southern extremity a convent, which being dissolved some fifty years ago was converted into a modern villa castle. The hamlet on the western shore was also built in later years, as we are told in the "Fioretti," on account of the miracles that were wrought in the holy place where he had kept the Fast. At one time this hamlet was a considerable village; it still contains a few old Gothic houses. Until the conversion of convent into castle, the whole history of the island was Franciscan; Francis, the Friars and the pilgrims, including several popes, were the only personages upon its tiny stage.

The spot that speaks to us most of the saint is the summit of the ridge, where in the old church of S. Angelo beside the cemetery are a few pathetic ruins of fourteenth-century frescoes and around is the exquisite view, that draws us, as it must have drawn the weak and famished penitent, by the misty loveliness of its sunrise over the pale sheet of water, the glory of the long solitary noon, when the towered cities—Passignano to the east, to the south and south-west S. Feliciano and Castiglione—grow visible among the reedy shores; the evening with its flight of waterfowl; the sunset behind lofty Amiata or the Santafiora that turns the circle of the hills to amethyst and rose. Or hither at midnight would he not creep up to say his matins, while the stars lay glassed upon the quiet water and the silence was only broken by the distant lapping of the waves?

Of his two loaves the saint ate the half of one of them, to

LAKE TRASIMENE AND THE ISOLA MAGGIORE

drive away the poison of vainglory, if he should seem to wish to rival Christ ; but he made the beautiful island his for ever, for few would remember it to-day, except for him.

II

High up on the slopes of Mount Subasio, almost directly above the present church of Rivo-Torto, is a deep ravine like a gash in the mountain. From it issued in old times a torrent, long since dry and only marked by its wide bed of stones, which from the angle that it made upon the plain was the original cause of the name of "Crooked Stream." In Francis's day the mountain sides were clothed with forests, stretching up past the present villages of Todero and S. Vitale, past the spring and the little convent of S. Angelo di Panso, up the steep, almost inaccessible, cliffs into the deep fold where the wood still grows, making a dark green patch upon the barren mountain. Often when he wished to get away from the world Francis would climb to this little glen and hide there in a cave, to pray and meditate.

Quite probably he knew it in his boyhood ; perhaps it was already endeared to him by lonely hours during the long struggle of his conversion. For he could reach it, as you can to-day, in little more than an hour's walking from the Cathedral of S. Rufino.

The grove is a place of wonder and beauty at all seasons. In summer it is always cool, for a delicious air breathes up from the sunless depths of the torrent bed through the paths and openings of the ilex grove ; in winter, although the snow is deep, and the storm-wind may rage on the heights above, yet here is shelter from the icy blast. The sun and the moon look into the glen discreetly, now upon one wall now upon the other, but hardly into the depths ; innumerable birds and flowers profit by these advantages, and for many months the air is sweet with fragrance and rich with song. It is not to be wondered, then, that Francis loved it ; and whoever wishes to know Francis will find his spirit lingering here rather than at many a larger convent.

The ascent from Assisi on a summer day is arduous, but the marvellous views of the plain below and the towers behind amply reward it ; indeed, there are few walks in the world so wonderful, for glory of sky and space, of cloud and colour. Flowers, such as cyclamen, love-in-a-mist, dog-roses, cowslips,

orchises, brighten the green banks according to the season; here and there giant oak-trees furnish shade, while one watches the wandering shadows on the valley; until finally, a great wooden cross, a leftwards bend, and the glen with its enclosed wood is before one. We skirt the wall, enter a gate, descend a short paved passage to an old door under a vault; pull a thin cord and hear a tinkle, and then the slow step of the sandalled friar, who with a gentle smile admits to the triangular convent court. The first impression is surprise at the strange minuteness of everything—the wall overhanging the fathomless ravine, filled with the tops of ilex-trees; the pavement of irregular flagstones with tufts of grass and weeds between them; the tiny circular wells and the low stone doorways through which one passes into the refectory or the chapel, bowing the head; the ladder staircase to the cells, hewn out of the rough rock;—here in all these is a typical Franciscan convent, in its peace and poverty, surely as St. Francis wished them all to be.

But all this is the work of S. Bernardino of Siena; in Francis's day it was wilder and cruder. There was a tiny oratory dedicated to the Virgin, the origin of which is lost in the mists of time. It is not impossible that in such a glen by a sacred spring the ancient Umbrians built a shrine to some tutelary deity, which the Benedictines of the great Abbey, that owned all the mountain, turned at some remote period to Christian use. It is not impossible that other hermit seers, long before St. Francis, wrestled with demons here and won their peace of heart. At any rate, beneath the shrine he found a little cave or lair, into which he could crawl to sleep in the brief intervals between long hours of prayer and meditation. Below, by paths fit only for a goat to climb, one may reach the cells or caves of some of his most intimate companions, and especially of Bernard, Sylvester, and Rufino. There are legends to be told about them all.

It is perhaps as well that the modern world has grown out of the old obsession of demons,—although far from us be it to deny that men may be still "possessed." But in the days of which we are writing there was almost universal testimony, not only as to the existence and local presence of such powers of evil, but of their actual visibility and physical manifestation. St. Francis in this place is said to have had at least one such encounter, and a certain hole in the rock hanging over

the abyss is shown as a scar produced by the rage of a defeated spirit, expelled by the power of his constancy. Here too the somewhat melancholy soul of Brother Rufino was beset by the demonic vision that took the form of the Crucified and tormented him with doubts of his salvation. But Francis, knowing from afar his trouble, sent Masseo to him with counsel as to the scornful manner in which he should receive the tempter. So the next time the vision came, the horror-stricken man insulted it; whereupon the demon flung away from him with such an outburst of violence that a great avalanche of stones was hurled down into the plain.

But other legends of this glen are gentler. Upon a certain ancient ilex, growing hard by the convent, the birds are said to have perched in flocks while Francis blessed them. In this wood he held his contest in singing with the nightingale, until after many hours his voice gave way. It was in his lonely cave here that Sylvester was making his customary retreat when Francis sent Masseo to him, as to Clare, begging him consult the Lord as to whether he should devote his life rather to prayer or preaching. Finally, it was hither that Francis came, sick, blind and weary, seeking Bernard, and when he was nigh called, "Bernard, Bernard, come to this blind man," and Bernard heard not. So when he had called to him vainly many times, Francis, hurt at his seeming coldness, betook himself to prayer, whereupon it was revealed to him that Bernard was rapt to God. Then Francis, overcome with remorse, waited patiently until the brother's ecstasy was ended and threw himself upon the ground before him. "By thy holy Obedience I command thee to do what I now bid thee," said he, and when Bernard had promised, added, "To punish me for the arrogance and rashness of my heart I bid thee, as I lie supine on the ground, set one foot on my neck and the other on my mouth and so pass over thrice from one side to the other, saying 'Lie there, thou churlish son of Peter Bernardone! Whence cometh such pride to thee that art so vile a creature?'" Which thing Bernard performed, with all the gentleness he could.

But sometimes men, in those days as in these, seem in truth to be possessed by devils. The story of a hitherto unknown adventure of Francis has recently been discovered in the archives of Assisi. It appears that certain mercenary soldiers, employed by the town against Perugia, for some

reason were refused their pay. To be revenged upon the citizens they seized the saint, when he was at the Carceri, carried him off, mocked him and beat him, holding him as security for their money. But indeed they little knew of Francis who acted thus, for he suffered his tribulations with such patience, steadily refusing to be used for blackmail, and protesting that he deserved his punishments, that, finally convinced they could get nothing in this manner, the ruffians released him and fled over the hills.

III

The Carceri is the first among Franciscan hermitages; but a score of similar little shrines, scarcely less beautiful, are scattered over the mountains of "Franciscan Italy." Some, such as Greccio and Fonte Colomba, or the Celle of Cortona, will be briefly described as the scenes of well-known actions of St. Francis's life. Others, such as Poggio Bustone, high on its barren mountain slope above the plateau of Rieti; Monteluco, amid the ilex-woods that overhang Spoleto; Stroncone, with its cypresses and frescoes, to the south of Terni; Farneto, close beside the splendid road that runs from Perugia to Gubbio; Sarteano and Cetona with their glorious views to the south-west of the Lake of Chiusi, and many another, can find no more than a passing mention in these pages.

It was at Poggio Bustone that, according to Thomas of Celano, the saint thought it necessary to confess before the crowd, which had come to seek him at Easter, that he had eaten food dressed with lard during Lent. Monteluco has memories not only of St. Francis, but of St. Anthony, S. Bernardino of Siena, and the Blessed Paolo Trinci. At Farneto, it is told of St. Francis how, to try a youth's obedience, he bade him plant his dry staff in the ground and water it night and morning for many days, after which it sprouted and grew into a tree; here, too, the friars were visited at different times by angels disguised as men. Cetona was held by the Blessed Giles as one of the holiest spots upon the earth on account of the many visions that he saw there; while Sarteano is famous for that pathetic scene that a nameless Brother saw in the winter moonlight and was forbidden to disclose until after Francis's death. For the devil told the saint one night that the Lord would have no pity on the sinner who killed himself with penance, whereupon to conquer the temptation Francis

THE HERMITAGE OF THE CARCERI

took off his habit and scourged himself, then, running out naked into the mountain slopes, gathered the snow together into seven tall heaps. "Behold!" he cried to his rebellious flesh, "here is thy wife and these other four thy sons and daughters; and these last two are thy manservant and maid-servant. Now haste to clothe them, for they are perishing with cold!"

Every hermitage has its legend, more or less supernatural; its hallowed cave that was his bed, its sacred tree that grew up from his staff, its spring that gushed forth at his word, its rock imprinted by his grasp, its hole the Fiend made, baulked by him, its door at which an angel knocked on a mission to minister to his need or to rebuke his foes. These stories have a peculiar note, a naïve, mediæval quality, reminiscent of the natural magic of those times. It is important for our later study that we should mark this trait. Until quite recently these hermitages were seldom visited by strangers, on account of their relative inaccessibility; but modern means of transport have brought them nearer to the world. They all repay the little trouble that it requires to reach them, for in the beauty of their site and the charm of their strange legends is half the secret of "Franciscan Italy."

CHAPTER IX

St. Francis's Dilemma and His Preaching at Cannara—St. Francis and the Birds and Animals.

I

CLARE and her sisterhood had not long been settled at S. Damiano when Francis was assailed with doubts as to the true object of his Order and particularly as to his own part in it. Was it God's will that he should give himself to prayer and contemplation and the mystic joys of what he called "the life of angels" or that he should go forth to preach and minister to men?

Thus from the very outset of his apostolacy we see the doubt, the conflict, which was in after years to draw his followers apart as to two poles, and set them in bitter variance with each other. On the one hand, there were to be his Knights Contemplatives, such as Leo, Bernard, Giles, Rufino, Guido, Jacopone, John of La Verna, Conrad of Offida, Ubertino of Casale and many another, who hid themselves away in hermitages and caverns, with often almost incredible sacrifices to Poverty, compensated by the mystic life of revelation; on the other hand, his Knights Ministers, led by Anthony and Bonaventure, and organized by that great General, Elias of Beviglie, who built large convents in the poorest quarters of populous cities, with hospitals and theological schools for missionary preachers, whose heroism of service was sometimes rewarded by worldly office, fame and temporal power.

Francis in his perplexity found a typical expedient; he called Masseo and sent him to Clare at San Damiano and Sylvester at the Carceri, begging them to make his guidance a subject for their prayers. On Masseo's return Francis received him as God's herald, washing his feet and setting food before him; then taking him into the wood he fell upon his knees, drew back his cowl and making a cross with his arms prepared to receive his orders. Masseo told him that both to Clare

and to Sylvester it had been revealed that his vocation was to preach the Gospel for the saving of men's souls.

"Then let us go forth in Christ's name," he cried, and taking with him Masseo and Angelo Tancredi, he set out towards Spoleto. When they were gone about an hour on their way they came to the walled village or castle of Cannara. You can see it clearly from Assisi on the road that goes from the Porta Moiano past S. Rufino d'Arce and across the plain in a wide curve towards Bevagna. To walk to it takes nearly two hours, but the way is charming, between fertile fields, set with small mulberry trees, with vines and slender poplars, and threaded by many little streams. The village offers an excellent example of a mediæval "castle," nearly a perfect square, three to four hundred yards each way, walled in, with a gate at the centre of each side and a tower at each corner. On the far side its walls are washed by the mainstream of the Topino; doubtless a moat encircled it with drawbridges at the gates. The streets are narrow, dark and usually crowded. But they were emptied of their folk on the day when Francis preached in a field outside the walls—preached with such power and fervour that the whole population asked to be allowed to join the Order. He sent them back to their little town with a promise that he would devise a plan for their salvation.

Such was the truly Franciscan origin of the Third Order, which, protected by the Popes as a strong solvent of Feudalism, spread rapidly through Christendom and became the rule of life for emperors and kings, for queens and noble ladies, for artists and poets, men of study and men of action. This Order he inaugurated at Cannara, according to the local tradition now recorded by a tablet in the church dedicated to the "Holy Death," which faces the site of the old Franciscan hospice, wherein it is said he often rested when preaching in the district. It is true that Poggibonsi also claims the honour of being the village in which the Third Order was inaugurated, but the point is a legal one merely, for the Rule was not drawn up in its definite form until 1222, with the help of Cardinal Ugolino.

To understand the miracle of the conversion of a whole village we must remember that preaching at this period was the almost exclusive privilege of Bishops, and that their homilies, delivered generally in Latin, were probably far

above the comprehension of feudal serfs. The simple exhortations in their own vernacular by a saintly wanderer even poorer than themselves must have come with the force of revelation. There was no questioning the truth or the sincerity of his message, inspired as it was with ardent faith and desire to save their souls. These people had no doubt of Hell, or their own iniquities, or the fearful punishments prepared for them by their heavenly Overlord. Through all their passionate hatreds they believed in love, as men, especially during war, believe in peace; repentance, peace and charity were their chief spiritual needs. Through the length and breadth of the land, wherever Francis or his brethren went, their appeal met but one answer—the cry of men just emerging from a long night of slavery to ignorance, cruelty and barbarism, fruits of a brutal tyranny by which they had been debased.

II

But it was not only the peasants of the agricultural "castles" to whom Francis preached while passing through these lands and who, caught in the inexplicable charm that emanated from him, were ready to forsake for him the tenor of their life. It was at this time, and on the road from Cannara to Bevagna, that befell that episode most commonly associated with him in popular remembrance. As you approach Bevagna the country becomes slightly undulating; from every eminence the view of the hills beyond Foligno widens; the vineyards with their regular rows of stunted mulberries cease; small clumps of elms break the wide spaces of the open fields, intersected by tributaries of the Topino. The less intensive cultivation, the presence of much water, and the larger trees contribute to make this neighbourhood even to-day a much more suitable land for birds than either the arid hill-tops or the serried and populous plain. Here was it that as Francis with Masseo and Angelo was journeying towards Bevagna he lifted up his eyes and saw upon a clump of trees birds in an infinite multitude. Wondering at their number, he said to his companions, "Tarry ye here by the way, for I will go and preach to my little sisters." So he went into the field and began to preach to those upon the ground; and those that were upon the trees flew down to hear him and departed not till he had given them his blessing. He even went among them, touching them with his garment, and not one among

them stirred! The "Fioretti" give us the substance of his sermon:

"My little sisters the birds, much are ye beholden to God your Creator, and always and in every place ought ye to praise Him. He hath given you a double and a triple vesture; He hath given you freedom to go in every place; and He also preserved your seed in the Ark of Noah, lest your kind should perish utterly from off the earth. Again, ye are beholden to Him for the air, which He hath appointed for you; and though you neither sow nor reap, God feedeth you and giveth you the rivers and the fountains for your drink; He giveth you the mountains and the valleys for your refuge, and the tall trees wherein to build your nests; and forasmuch as ye neither spin nor sew, He clotheth you and your children also. Wherefore since your Creator loveth you so much and hath dealt so bountifully with you, you must beware, my little sisters, of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to praise God."

The anonymous narrators conclude their tale by telling us how the birds expressed their joy, opening their beaks, stretching out their necks and fluttering their wings: while the Saint bent over them rejoicing and marvelling at their multitude and loveliness, their attention and familiarity. At length, his sermon ended, he made the sign of the cross over them, whereupon they all flew up together in one flock and in the air divided themselves into four squadrons after the manner of the cross that Francis had made over them; and one company flew to each of the four winds. And each flock sped forth singing, like the friars at Francis's bidding, possessing nothing, committing all things to the providence of God.

No better symbol could be found of Francis's conception of his Order. Moreover, the coincidence of time and place of this sermon to the birds and that other to the people of Cannara is not without significance. Unquestionably, Francis held that all men should live the Gospel life, and if for the moment he refused to admit a whole community, yet in his mind he was already seeking for a Rule in which he might include them. Now in Francis's mind the birds had solved it for themselves; they were already in an Order. They sang their matins and their other offices at their canonical hours; moreover, they were subject to the great Rule of Universal Holy Obedience.

A few years later, on his return from the East, when he was crossing the Venetian marshes, he and his companion came on another flock of singing-birds. "Our sisters are praising

their Creator," said he, "let us go join them and recite the Hours." But the birds sang so loudly that neither could hear the other as they said the alternate verses. Francis looked round. "My sisters, cease from singing until we have rendered our due praises to the Lord." So the birds held their peace until the Friars' Office was concluded, whereupon they at once took up their song again after their wonted fashion. A slightly different version of the same episode is told of the exquisite island hermitage of S. Francesco nel Deserto in the midst of the Lagoon.

At another time when he was preaching at Alviano, he could scarcely be heard by reason of the shrill twitterings of many swallows. "My sisters the swallows," he cried, "it is now time that I should speak. Pray you keep silence until my preaching is ended."

Again at the Carceri we have a similar episode and at another time a benediction of many birds. At La Verna the birds ever came to him freely and especially a certain falcon that would not leave him. At Siena it is a pheasant; at the Portiuncula a cicada; at Greccio a leveret; on the island in Lake Trasimene a rabbit; at the lake of Rieti a water-fowl; at another time near Siena a flock of sheep. But most famous and most strange of all is the tale of the Wolf of Gubbio.

There have been many attempts to rationalize this story, to make out that this "Wolf" was a fierce robber, who had earned himself the nickname by his ferocity. But if one begins to rationalize these stories, it is difficult to see where one is to stop. We know that Gubbio was afflicted by a plague of wolves about this time. Moreover, besides an ancient inscription relating the incident, the skeleton of a wolf has recently been found deeply buried in an old Franciscan church, S. Francesco della Pace, in that strange and beautiful city. Witness too is an ancient inscription over the door. Taken together with the many similar stories of Francis's amazing power over wild animals, the legend may perhaps be reduced to the fact that the saint, when resting or praying in a solitary place outside the town, met and tamed a wolf by that admitted influence, and, having brought it with him to the convent, ordered that it should be kept and fed with the friars by public charity.

Who can explain or unravel this gift, this natural magic, which Francis unquestionably wielded? Yet a few words

THE TIBER NEAR PANTANELLO WHERE ST. FRANCIS BLESSED THE FISHES

CHAPEL NEAR GUBBIO, ERECTED ON THE SPOT WHERE ST. FRANCIS CONVERTED THE WOLF

of his own may cast a light on it. In his "Salutation of the Virtues," probably composed at La Verna in 1216, he cries, "O Holy Obedience, thou confoundest the will of the body and the flesh, thou takest the body and makest it to obey the spirit and to obey a neighbour and all the animals and wild beasts, so that these too can be free with man, as far as God permits it." He believed that the whole Creation—not only the birds, the beasts and insects, but even the heavenly bodies and elements (as we shall see when we come to consider his great hymn "The Praises of the Creatures")—is bound together in a larger Brotherhood, a vast religious Order, of which his own was but a part and type, and that the Rule, the bond, the secret of the power of miracle, was the surrendering of the carnal will in Holy Obedience to the Creator.

For Obedience was not only to free the soul from fear, from anger and from worldly care, but to enable a Brother, being as a "dead body in the hand of his superior," to draw on infinite strength from his dependence. Every man redoubles his strength in carrying out an order; he adds, according to his discipline, the will-power or enabling power of his commander to his own. So the servant of God adds Almighty Power to enable his own weakness in carrying out the Word of God, according to his faith. "For when we obey a command without response or judgment," says St. Francis, "there is no impossibility; though we are commanded to do things beyond our strength, yet will Holy Obedience give us power to do them." This great Franciscan Virtue is thus the Fount of Power, of Peace, of Miracle, and the key to the Rule of the mystic Order of the natural world.

CHAPTER X

The Indulgence of the Portiuncula—The Chapel of the Roses—The "Perdono," as it is to-day.

I

THERE is no more characteristic feature of the Middle Ages, or of Catholic countries in our day, than pilgrimage, a pious act equivalent to penance, that gains indulgence, whereby the temporal punishment of sin is expiated after its eternal guilt has been washed from the soul by penitence, confession and absolution. Pilgrimages have also other obvious attractions. As an old peasant woman said, "They divert the mind and gladden the heart, as well as comfort the soul." Moreover, they are a great source of education, like all travel, with sundry great advantages over the British custom of Bank Holiday excursion: their motive saves them from vulgarity, they are truly democratic, and, finally—there is the indulgence.

Crusaders were shriven when they took the cross and won plenary indulgence; pilgrims, then as now, confessed and were absolved when they reached their goal, gaining the indulgence when they made their offering at the shrine: but to cross the world to the Holy Land, or to visit the Tombs of the Apostles or St. James of Compostella, was a privilege of the strong and wealthy. Characteristically, Francis longed for an Indulgence for the poor. In the latter part of the year 1216, possibly in the winter, this aspiration was confirmed to him in a vision at the Portiuncula, which forms the subject of the fresco that embellishes the façade of that venerable chapel. He was bidden, or authorized, to go in the Name of Christ to the Pope, then at Perugia, and ask that to the Little Portion should be accorded the same tremendous privileges as to the greatest shrines of Christendom.

The story begins at the Portiuncula with a record of the holy man's temptations—so consoling to the sinner—and of

his methods of overcoming them—somewhat the reverse! The temptation seems to have been nothing less terrible than the diabolical suggestion that he should allow his poor body to go to sleep at an hour set apart for his orisons! Corrado, Bishop of Assisi in 1335, gives this account of it.

"In the month of January, St. Francis being at prayer within his cell, behold to him comes Satan in the night and says: 'Francis, why wouldst thou die before thy time? Knowst not that sleep is a great healing for the body? Why therefore kill thyself with so much watching?' Then Francis, knowing the false flattery of the Enemy, strips himself naked and in the night goes from his cell and through a hedge of thorns crawls scratched and bleeding; when suddenly appears around him a great light; and all the wood is filled with white and crimson roses, and in the light appears a multitude of angels, announcing the approach of the Madonna and her Son! And thinking he should return to his cell to clothe himself, he finds that he is robed in dazzling raiment; wherefore gathering of the roses he enters the holy Chapel to lay them upon the Altar and sees above it Christ and His Mother with the angelic host."

Of Christ he asks for the Plenary Indulgence, and of the roses he brings a few as a token to the Pope. The garden of the Thornless Roses is shown to every visitor, but the shoots are thin and sparse to-day and seldom bloom.

Over the saint's cell one may see the Chapel of the Roses, built by St. Bonaventure, extended by S. Bernardino, and frescoed with the legend by Tiberio d'Assisi. The whole place forms a charming record of the tale.

Meanwhile the great Pope Innocent III had died at Perugia in July 1216 and the aged and gentle Honorius reigned in his stead. To him went Francis, asking in Christ's name for the privileges of Plenary Indulgence to be given to the Portiuncula for all who should visit it in a state of grace without making an oblation. There is another charming fresco of his journey by Tiberio d'Assisi in another Chapel of the Roses in the cloister of S. Fortunato near Montefalco. The saint is hurrying with the flowers in his hands through a snowy landscape accompanied by two angels; alas! that history should raise any question as to the season!

The Pope was living in the Canonica, that vast dark building in the Piazza of Perugia, between the splendid fourteenth-century town hall and the Cathedral of S. Lorenzo. Honorius was frankly amazed at the audacity of the request; he asked

for how many days or years of penance the indulgence was to be equivalent.

"O my Lord Pope," cried Francis passionately, "why dost thou speak of years or time, when I am asking thee for souls?"

"But it is not the custom of the Church to grant such an indulgence."

"It is not I who ask it, but my Lord Jesus Christ." To the amazement of the Cardinals the indulgence was conceded. All they could do was to get the period, during which it might be obtained, limited to one day, from the first vesper of the first of August to the first vesper of the second, that is, the feast of St. Peter-in-Chains. But even so restricted, the Indulgence was unique in those times, and Francis was radiant with joy as he turned to depart.

"Where goest thou, O simpleton?" exclaimed Honorius, "Wouldest thou have no writing to confirm so great a favour?"

"If this be the work of God, I need no writing; for the Blessed Virgin Mary is my charter, Christ the notary, and the holy angels are the witnesses," said Francis. On his way home to the Portiuncula he told Masseo that the indulgence which had been granted was already confirmed in Heaven. Shortly afterwards it was promulgated by seven Umbrian Bishops—somewhat unwillingly, it has been said.

Ever since that time thousands of peasants from all parts of Italy have flocked to the Portiuncula on the last day of July, to obtain the indulgence on the morrow, for themselves, or for some dead member of their family. Following Francis's humble steps we grow impatient at the great cold edifice that seems to take the life and poetry from his little chapel, pitifully dressed up, Alas! in a frigid modern fresco, that tells its exquisite story in an unconvincing way. But on the day of "the Perdono" we begin to understand the function of this vast and inexpressive building. It becomes a shelter for thousands of dusty, weary and perspiring peasants, frantic to miss no moment when they might be winning an indulgence by simply passing in and out of the precious little shrine. The present church was built from the designs of Vignola by Galeazzo Alessi during the latter half of the sixteenth century, but it only replaced a much earlier Gothic church, erected on the site of Francis's convent.

The pilgrims come from the most distant parts of central and southern Italy, many of them still dressed in the costume

of their village. They come by road or rail, in motor chars-à-bancs, or in painted carts, on horseback, mule-back or on foot, often passing a whole week upon the way. They tie up their animals on the shady side of the open space before the church and park their carts and other vehicles hard by. Around is a fair with booths containing almost every conceivable article of apparel, with boots and shoes, scarves and hats, or toilet things, scissors and knives, combs, brushes and cheap jewellery, and everywhere crucifixes, holy pictures and statuettes, medals and rosaries in vast profusion. The ice-cream barrows and the stalls of cakes, of nuts and sweetmeats, are surrounded by children, for whom are toys innumerable, with clusters of red or green balloons floating against the blue sky. Characteristic are the stacks of water-melons, piled up, green and cool, under the plane-trees, a few here and there cut open to show their pink inside. Everywhere the sober peasants are bargaining, eating or resting upon the grass.

But one feels that their thoughts are centred on the little shrine with its gaudy fresco in the middle of the stately nave, for the scene within the church is far more animated than the secular fair without. Around the Portiuncula is a seething crowd of humanity, which streams in at the west door and out at the side, to push and hurry back and round again as fast as its volume will permit. There are men and women who from the great west door of the church will move right up the long nave upon their knees ; until lately, many, especially those from the neighbourhood of Naples, crawled the whole way on their stomachs and bleeding faces, kissing, licking the stones ! But this a recent regulation has forbidden. There are those who go up stolidly with set expression on their toil-worn faces ; others timidly yet in eagerness, as though beseeching some great grace ; some seem to go like lovers with an almost mincing tenderness ; a few as though in an ecstatic dream. Many, no doubt, are seeking the indulgence for themselves, or praying silently as they tell their beads for some personal grace or favour ; but in the hearts of others the indulgence is for one dead. We saw one grey-haired woman on reaching the door take a locket from her neck, open it and kiss the portrait of a young soldier, before she went down on her knees to make her painful way right up the long nave to the Portiuncula.

Most of the pilgrims, as they go, sing litanies to the Blessed Virgin; some join in a strange, oft-repeated cry that runs: "Evviva Maria! Evviva Maria! Evviva Maria e Chi la creò!" The whole church rings with undirected singing, one litany or hymn breaking in upon another as a new stream enters the great door; for a short while there is a contest, until one tune predominates and is triumphantly swelled as the whole crowd catch it up together.

In the side-chapels and in corners, like back eddies out of the main stream, are old folk and children, overwhelmed with their fatigues, fallen asleep upon their bundles. It is certainly the festival of the poor, as Francis wished. A recent Bull has extended the period during which it can be won, indefinitely, so the saint has his whole desire after seven centuries; but the peasant folk continue to come at the traditional season. On this day by the same Bull the Indulgence may be obtained in all Franciscan churches, or even in a parish church, if there be no Franciscan church at hand; but the peasants make this pilgrimage from sheer desire for sacrifice. It is a festival of love; its characteristic gesture is the kiss. As they enter the Portiuncula the peasants kiss the doorpost; when they kneel down they prostrate themselves to kiss the altar steps. They kiss their rosaries and hold them up to touch every sacred object. They beg the friars to lay them for an instant on the altar. They kiss the stones of the little shrine, made out of the cell in which St. Francis died. They even kiss the little coins which they throw into the sanctuary, as though they hoped to speed a kiss to the Madonna.

It matters little if they realize the tremendous meaning of their indulgence; eternal spiritual laws relaxed, the harrowing of Purgatory! To come to this holy place, to touch, caress and kiss it is their passion; to crown the sweetness of their sacrifice in an intense expression of their love.

CHAPTER XI

The Central Valley of the Tiber—The Preaching of St. Francis—Montefalco, Todi, Alviano, Lugnano, Amelia, Narni, Terni—The Intimacy of St. Francis.

I

IT is by witnessing such scenes as " the Perdono " that one begins to understand St. Francis's preaching, and the passionate revivals it invoked. As we have said, in the twelfth century preaching in church was rare, the privilege of Bishops, and those to whom they gave licence. The field was open to the heretics, whose influence was largely due to the general longing for religious thoughts.

For the people were rapidly awakening from the evil dream of slavery and superstition. Mediæval Umbria was athirst for Francis, for one who should give their faith a heart, a sentimental life and colour; their eagerness a channel of dramatic utterance. By his sweet penetrating voice, his power of clear, imaginative language and, above all, by his personality —a miracle of spiritual charm—he won their hearts directly; which with these warm, impulsive people means their uttermost devotion. The Umbrians are particularly attracted by three things—refinement, strangers, children; the charm of St. Francis for them was all three. His childlike defencelessness and innocence disarmed them, his gentleness and physical fragility constrained them, his exquisite courtesy, his rarity, enchanted. The preaching was simple in thought, but deep in feeling; full of ecstatic fervour and striking living images, which all men could understand. Celano speaks with wonder of the " lucidity of mind that gave him such security of speech that without preparation he would say marvellous unheard-of things." " He made his whole body a tongue to preach the Kingdom."

None of his sermons have come down to us; what hearer could reconstruct them? We only know that he used many parables, and from such parables of his as we have, we are left to imagine the type that he used in his discourses.

A vivid symbolism is his note through all his life. We have the symbol of the buried treasure in his boyhood, the exquisite invention of Lady Poverty, his parable to Pope Innocent of the poor woman, his dreams of the tall tree, of the little black hen, of the crumbs and the wafer, his images of the blind man and his puppy, of the soul in the body as the friar in his cell, of the friar like the lark with its grey habit and its hood and all the world for its cloister, of the idle brother as a fly, of money as flies only fit for the dung-heap, of his own body like poor overdriven Brother Ass, of the obedient Brother as a dead body, and many more that anyone may find in the pages of the "Speculum Perfectionis" and the "Fioretti." One of the finest is the parable of the King who sent two of his servants with a message to his Queen. On their return he questioned them separately. The first spoke eloquently of her beauty, thinking to display his loyalty and to flatter his master; the second had seen nothing, and remembered nothing but her answer. This was commended for his diligence; that was rebuked, for the beauty of the Queen was not his matter, but the King's. Such is the beauty of the creature, not man's care, but God's.

It was all so new, so unexpected to the people in the second decade of the thirteenth century, accustomed only to dry hieratic Latin homilies or the occasional railings of the heretics. No wonder that the church-bells rang, whenever the little figure was seen approaching the gates of some walled town or castle, that the inhabitants ceased from work, and the peasants left their fields and hurried forth to meet him with branches of olive in their hands. After his sermon they would press round him, striving to touch and kiss his habit; cutting off strips of it to keep as relics. One can picture the stalwart friars, like Masseo, pushing the crowd to right and left to clear a path for the slender, tired preacher, sternly rebuking the unruly and gently assuring others of their turn. One can see similar scenes to-day at the "Perdono." Wherever Francis went, the children ran before him crying, "Ecco il Santo!" while those behind prostrated themselves in the dust to kiss his footprints. The enthusiasm grew to veritable intoxication, on every hand were wonders and miracles reported.

Bread that he blessed cured divers infirmities; water, in which his cord had been dipped, allayed fevers; the reins of

a beast he had ridden brought an easy child-birth. But so afraid was he that grace might be taken from him by vainglory that only very rarely would he willingly use these powers.

At Toscanella, (a desolate little town beyond Viterbo with wonderful Romanesque churches), he healed the infant son of his host from lameness and debility by laying hands upon him; but it was only after much hesitation. At Narni, the city that so proudly guards the entrance of Umbria from the south, he cured a paralytic, who for five months could only move his tongue and eyes; but it seems that this was at the instance of the Bishop. At Gubbio, a woman came to him with both hands contorted; he touched them quickly and restored them to her use. At Orte, he healed a boy of terrible deformity at the tearful entreaties of his parents; in the district of Rieti we are told of a similar case. At Narni he restored sight to a woman stricken with blindness; at Bevagna, to a girl. At Bologna, he healed a boy, blind in one eye, who afterwards entered the Order. At S. Gemini and at Città di Castello, he cast out demons "by the power of Holy Obedience." Such are a few of the miracles of healing reported by Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure, whose accounts are usually detailed and circumstantial, the former writing while the events were still fresh in men's minds. With every act, with every word the tide of faith rose higher.

Nor was it only among the poor and ignorant that his preaching moved so deeply. Thomas of Spalato, when he was a student, in 1222, had the good fortune to hear Francis preach in the great square of Bologna before the Communal Palace, a privilege which has conferred on that student an earthly immortality. The whole city assembled to hear the saint; a very different crowd to those which flocked after his footsteps through the villages of Umbria. The Dalmatian reports that he treated his theme so well that many learned men stood filled with admiration to hear such words come from the lips of an uneducated friar. His text was "Angels, men and devils" and his subject the quenching of factional hatred in the city. "His dress was poor, his person contemptible, his face without beauty; but God inspired his words with so much power that great scholars were astounded and many noble families, divided by blood-feuds, were reconciled for ever."

Then we know how he preached at Rome before Honorius

and the Papal Court, having at Ugolino's bidding carefully prepared his sermon. When he stood up the words he had put together were instantly forgotten and Ugolino trembled for his friend. But after a moment's hesitation, "he poured forth his heart with such eloquence and fervour, dancing the while with his feet," says Thomas of Celano, "that the Cardinals, who had rather come to scoff, were moved to tears of penitence and the whole assembly was filled with joy and edification."

Well might good Thomas of Celano write, quoting the fervid rhetoric of Gregory:

"He shone like a bright star upon the blackness of the night and as the dawn diffused upon the darkness; so that in brief the aspect of the province changed and losing its ancient horror became smiling. Vanished the former dryness, and in the squalid field the harvest grew luxuriant; even the wild vine began to put forth shoots of God's good savour and burgeoning in flowers of sweetness bore fruits of purity and virtue. Resounded on all sides hymns of thanksgiving, so that, forsaking this world's cares, many learned in the life and teaching of Father Francis to know themselves and turned to love and to the worship of the Creator. . . . For the men and the women ran, the clerics and religious hastened, to see and hear the Saint of God, who seemed to all a man of another world. . . . Even most learned scholars, illustrious for fame and dignity, marvelled at his discourses and trembled before him with salutary fear. . . . Many, both noble and humble, cleric and lay, touched by the divine inspiration, came to him desirous of fighting for ever under his guidance and his orders. And to all alike the saint of God, as an abundant river of heavenly grace, made flowers of virtue blossom in the garden of the heart; and to each he gave a rule of life and showed the true way of salvation, according to his appropriate condition."

II

We can trace his steps by the little convents and hermitages that sprang up in his path like wayside flowers. To the south of the Valley of Spoleto, there is a vast constellation of such hermitages, scattered along the valleys of the Tiber, the Nera, the Paglia, and the Velino with their many tributaries, and over the verdant hills surrounding them. We can only mention a tithe.

The more Franciscan road to Todi from Assisi is across the plain through the walled village of Cannara, where the whole population begged to be allowed to join the Order, across the Topino, close to the Pian d' Arce, where Francis first preached to the birds, and through a well-watered undulating country to the old town of Bevagna, where the mediæval walls with their

gates and towers, and the wonderful little piazza with its Romanesque churches of S. Silvestro and S. Michele, its fountain and its Gothic Consular Hall, hark back to days not far remote from Francis, while in his church—though this is modernized—one may see the very stone on which, it is said, he stood when preaching to the birds.

From the main road a few miles farther one may diverge to Montefalco, a veritable treasure-house of Umbrian art. Francis himself came here in 1215, albeit no personal records of his visit remain. But truly Franciscan is S. Fortunato, an old parish church a short way to the south-east of the town, which with its barrel roof and many paintings is now the chapel of a typical and delightful convent of four friars, who have simple little cells, an open loggia with fine views, a lovely ilex-wood and, above all, a little chapel in the cloister called the Chapel of the Roses, charmingly frescoed by Tiberio d'Assisi with the legend of the "Perdono." In Montefalco one should also see the two Augustinian churches of Sta. Illuminata with many frescoes, and of Sta. Chiara of Montefalco, not to be confounded with her namesake of Assisi. Attached to the latter is an interesting frescoed chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross. But the chief treasures are in S. Francesco, a Conventual Franciscan church of the fourteenth century, which besides numerous most precious works by native artists, such as Melanzio, Mezzastris, Nelli, Niccolò da Foligno, and Tiberio d'Assisi, and others by scholars of Giotto or Buffalmacco, contains one of the loveliest pictorial renderings of the life of Francis in a series of fourteen scenes frescoed in its apse by Benozzo Gozzoli. Finally, no one should leave this place until he has climbed the tower of the Communal Palace, or he will miss what is perhaps the finest view to be obtained from any town in Umbria—the whole heart of "Franciscan Italy" spread out before one with its countless towns and villages, to be picked out like old friends in a new light.

The road hence to Todi goes on through undulating country, which, solitary and still richly wooded, carries one back to Francis's day more easily than the populous land of cultivated fields. On almost every rise are ancient castles. The town that stands up so proudly to the right is Gualdo Cataneo, whence came the canon lawyer Peter, the second companion of the saint; Montecchio, la Rocchetta, Castel Rinaldi afford us good examples of the old feudal villages, in whose courts

or streets the Brothers must often have preached and begged. Near Massa Martana no fewer than four churches may be visited: SS. Fidenzio and Terenzio, a Benedictine church of the twelfth century; S. Illuminata, still more ancient; S. Maria in Pantano and S. Maria delle Grazie with many frescoes of the Umbrian school. Thence gradually the road descends towards the valley of the Tiber, until suddenly Todi appears on her great flat rock in the middle of the valley, a site that for proud defiance is hardly inferior to that of Orvieto.

Todi has three great lines of walls, Etruscan, Roman, mediæval; wide views; curious narrow streets with vaults and arches; a square with a grand group of Gothic buildings; a glorious Romanesque cathedral, and an interesting Gothic church; and a little way below her walls a fine Renaissance temple. She has her great Franciscan poet, Jacopone, of whom we must speak at length in place; she has also the following record of St. Francis.

On the Perugian road, close to the cemetery, there stands on the right-hand side a tabernacle or roadside shrine. Here, not far from the Tiber, Francis met a woman with a basket of linen clothes upon her head. He stopped her and asked where she was going. "To the river," she replied; "to wash these clothes of mine." "Nay, woman," said Francis, "what thou carriest belongeth unto God. Set down thy basket and I will take charge of him." Under the clothes was a new-born child. Thereafter he built upon that spot a little hut, which he entrusted to the care of charitable women, and thus instituted the first foundling hospital for the shelter of the illegitimate children of the poor.

From Todi one can drive on by a wonderful road to Orvieto; a road between oak-woods, through ravines and over uplands, with castles and fine distant views, that recall the pictures of Claude Lorraine. This, too, is the old Umbria of St. Francis. One crosses the Tiber at Todi's foot, by a bridge that springs out of a mediæval castle, Pontecuto, and about half-way one comes upon Castel Prodo, a truly magnificent ancient fortress, guarding the pass. It was built by the Salvani family of Siena (henceforth known as the Prodenzani or Provenzani), in the very year when Francis passed through Orvieto, that is, in 1222, as is recorded in a rhyming Latin poem which prophesies that any future descendant selling the place shall

lose all his possessions. The landscape is of rugged grandeur, very different from the gentle loveliness of the Valley of Spoleto. The peak of Amiata dominates the ridges, that rise line after line to the north-west, and finally Orvieto on its marvellous island rock emerges from the mists of the Paglia valley. The strength of its natural walls of precipice made it a great city in prehistoric times, a meeting-place and the centre of the Etruscan League; but the jealousy of Rome destroyed it, and in Francis's day, although occasionally, like Perugia, a papal residence, it was not a city of importance. Its cathedral, with its wonderful façade and the glorious frescoes by Luca Signorelli, has no place in Franciscan Italy, although it was close by that Francis found Honorius in 1220, an interview which must have taken place in the episcopal palace that stood between the old cathedral of that period and the later papal palace on the west side of the square, erected by Boniface VIII in the last years of the century.

The new road from Orvieto towards Narni runs down the valley of the Paglia, and crosses about a mile below its junction with the Tiber. It has many memories of Francis and the great evangelizing years. North of the bridge is the old castle of Baschi, where Francis healed a petty feudal war between the three sons of a certain Count Ugolino, who from gratitude erected for him a little hermitage among the woods at Pantanelli, which after his death developed into a famous convent. Among others dwelt here the poet Jacopone, and here composed, it is said, the "Stabat Mater." Of Francis's day the convent boasts little besides a fountain, a cave, an ilex and a rock, from which he blessed the fishes in the Tiber. The building now abandoned is in part the work of S. Bernardino of Siena.

The road climbs up the face of the hills and soon dominates the Tiber valley, with glorious views over the Ciminian Hills and even a glimpse of Mount Soracte. For some twenty miles you seem to skirt the southern rampart of Umbria, on a mountain wall, which throws out a series of spurs like bastions towards the plain, each crowned with a venerable city. About a mile beyond Guardea you pass the Church of S. Illuminata, a very ancient hermitage, once belonging to the order of S. Romualdo, but given to the Franciscans at a very early date. Near by is a cave and in it a large flat stone, which a brief inscription reports to be the bed of Francis.

A tradition tells that he often came here to rest when preaching to the villages and cities on this road.

A little more than a mile beyond is the castle or feudal village of Alviano. Four towers still proudly guard its angles and the apparatus of its drawbridge can be seen. In the castle courtyard is a chapel with a curious fresco, representing Francis pausing in his sermon to request a flight of swallows to hold their peace. "My sister swallows," he is saying, "it is now time that I should speak, for you have spoken long enough already; so listen to the word of God and be still and silent until my sermon is ended." Needless to say, the birds obeyed!

Only a few miles farther is another similarly situated little city, Lugnano, which possesses a precious eleventh-century church in Sta. Maria Collegiata. The most interesting façade with its columned porch, the crypt with its strange reliefs and mosaic pavement carry one back to Byzantine days and the transition between two great artistic traditions. The reliefs of St. Michael and the Dragon and of "the Salutation," are most important links in the history of art.

But Lugnano has also its record of Francis, which emphasizes the distance between his day and ours. While he was preaching there, a wolf carried off an infant—a testimony to the wildness of the land. It was winter and great flocks of duck were constantly passing over from the valley of the Tiber. Francis, it is said, commanded one of these to release the child, which it did, spying out from the air the way the wolf had taken and forcing it by fierce attack to abandon the helpless prey! The people of Lugnano determined to record this extraordinary miracle by erecting a convent for the Order, in the chapel of which may still be seen two representations of the episode.

A few miles from Lugnano, still round this mountain wall with its glorious view, its precipices, its ilex forests, and its bastion castles, such as Porchiano, we come to the ancient Etruscan city of Amelia, on a site that has to be seen to be conceived. Its toothlike rocks, its deep ravines, its grey cliffs, crowned by immemorial walls of cyclopean or polygonal masonry, make a unique impression even in this land of surprises. Its ancient churches have for the most part been ruined by the restorations of the seventeenth century, but in the Church of S. Francisco the six tombs of the family of

the Geraldini are interesting and beautiful, while at the summit of the town beside the old cathedral is a fine twelve-sided bell-tower, built by the Countess Matilda from the great stones and carven altars of the Etruscan temples that once dominated the height. Francis preached here for the first time in 1213, gathering the people together in the little Church of St. Mary of the Five Fountains, as it then was called. It still stands, close to the Porta Romana. It is said that he converted two women of evil life and put them on the way of penitence.

Some nine miles more of road, with a slight climb and then a long descent, bring us, as through a postern, within the great Umbrian gate of Narni in the valley of the Nera. Narni has several memories of St. Francis, who came here on the same evangelizing tour of the year 1213, when Ugolino, as they say, was Bishop of the place. Two miracles which he accomplished are reported: the healing of a paralytic at the desire of the Bishop and the restoration of a blind woman's sight. So impressed were pastor and flock by his preaching and these portents that they besought him to establish a little convent here, which in the fourteenth century was rebuilt and in the seventeenth restored. From Narni, after visiting the most interesting cathedral, one may follow the saint's steps to Calvi, where he made a little hermitage, afterwards enlarged and finally in the last century abandoned. Or one may pass on direct to Terni with its waterfalls and factories, an uninteresting industrial town, save for a few Franciscan episodes.

In the house attached to the little Church of S. Cristoforo the saint and a knight who came to visit him were entertained to dinner by the parish priest, who on going to table discovered that his wine was sour. Such things have chanced to the clergy before, but not without shame to Italians. So the saint blessed the flask, before it was passed round, and the guests declared that they had never tasted anything so good! And lo! while they sat at meat, a wall fell on a boy outside, crushing him to death. At the prayer of the frantic parents the saint took him by the hand, whereupon he arose as though from sleep.

But it was at his second visit in the year 1218 that a more characteristic incident took place. Bishop Raniero invited him to preach in the cathedral, and when he had finished,

sought to improve the moral of the sermon. "How now ought we all to give thanks to God," he cried, "for that He hath caused us to be so edified by this so contemptibly poor little man, this foolish and unlettered Francis!" Seldom has episcopal indiscretion produced a stranger answer; for the poor, contemptible, unlettered fool fell on his knees before him, with tears of joy kissing his feet, for that he had been so wise as to discern the precious from the vile, giving to him, Francis, scorn and to God honour!

III

After his death the intimacy of Francis was the chief boast of his companions. "We that were with him," they would say.

The first impression that the saint undoubtedly made on all, as on the Bishop of Terni, was of smallness, sallowness, weakness, simpleness, plainness, insignificance. Says Thomas of Spalato, the student who heard him preach at Bologna, "Sordidus erat habitus, persona contemptibilis et facies indecora." "Thou are not fair to look upon," stalwart and comely Masseo tells him. "Little wretch," "vilest worm," he calls himself with no shadow of false modesty. Thomas of Celano says he stood before the Pope "a little man of despicable appearance," and later gives us only details of his features.

"Of mediocre stature, inclining to smallness; head, ordinary and round; features, somewhat long and prominent; forehead, small and smooth; eyes, middling, dark and full of simpleness; black hair, straight brows; nose, regular, thin and straight; ears, standing out, but small; lips, small and thin; teeth, white and regular; beard, black and sparse; thin neck; straight shoulders, short arms, with fleshless hands, long fingers, prominent nails; slender legs, small feet, with little flesh."

Add to this the "swarthiness" of St. Bonaventure's description and it is the portrait of a plain little man. The Bishop of Terni was with the majority when he called him "this contemptibly poor little man, so foolish and unlettered." The people echoed it as a favourite term of affectionate endearment; "the Poor Little Man," Il Poverello.

All the earliest portraits confirm his plainness. It is only when one comes to those of later ages by painters who never

saw him, that one has the somewhat fleshy and comely Francis of Giotto, the fine intellectual Francis of the Sienese masters, and the sanctified loveliness of the Francis of Della Robbia. Had the real Francis been as these, Masseo's remark had been pointless, Celano's description inadequate, the Spalatine's and the Bishop's ill-natured and untrue. As for the many portraits, now in various public galleries, by Margaritone, Berlinghieri, Cimabue, and various unknown hands, they would all alike be unaccountable, not only in their creating, but still more in their survival among those who knew the saint's true aspect, if only by tradition. One is tempted to say that, for so great a man, Francis was distinguished by his very insignificance. It made his flame-like spirit all the more amazing.

In the crowded little convent, when he was merry, he would take two sticks and, holding one to his shoulder like a violin and using the other as a bow, he would hum and sing songs in the Provençal tongue to tunes of his own invention, and the grave men, who had given up everything for his ideal, would sit round and watch him with eyes of love, noting and treasuring every gesture! He would preach before Popes and learned scholars, straight out of his heart without preparation, and dance on his bare feet while he spoke for eagerness and the joy of his message. Or he would expound the Christmas Gospel as at Greccio and bleat out the words "Jesu Bambino" or "Bethlëem," imitating the voice of a new-born lamb—a dangerous experiment for a preacher! Or he would come in late to a banquet at the great Cardinal's table, cheerfully bringing a few dry crusts—the meed of his morning's begging! The more we watch him the more we are amazed to think how this strange being changed the spiritual history of the world. "God's Minstrel" he was indeed, "full of grace and truth." Every gesture, act or word was a revelation.

When he opened his lips, men who despised him were startled into attention. For his voice, Celano has strong praise; it was "vibrant, sweet, clear and sonorous,"—a first indication of unsuspected power. Then there was his obvious spontaneity and sincerity; he was always perfectly true and right. Moreover, he was often so surprising in his directness, so much higher and holier in his vision than other men. No doubt Brother Angelo thought he was acting bravely in rebuking robbers for their evil lives, until Francis sent him after them to beg their pardon! One wonders what Francis would have

done in Clare's position, had Frederick's Saracens attacked a convent under his charge. There was always an unaccountable element in his conduct, incomprehensible even to his most intimate companions.

Then consider his uncanny habit of reading the Brothers' thoughts. There was the case of the youth who was tempted to leave the Order because he fancied that Francis did not love him; the strange temptations of that moody, solitary, visionary Rufino; the unworthy thought of Leonard, the Assisan nobleman's son, trudging through the Venetian marshes in the July heat beside the ass on which Francis for his infirmities was constrained to ride, and whose discontent he scattered by a word; and, above all, there is the story of Masseo, "strong of body and mild of soul," who would have given his eyes, as he used to say, for the precious grace of humility, but who could not attain to it until near the end of life.

Listen to this passage of the "Fioretti":

"Once coming to a habitation, sore an-hungered, St. Francis and Masseo went to beg for bread according to the Rule; and St. Francis went to one district and Masseo to another. But forasmuch as St. Francis was a man of mean appearance and short of stature, and therefore looked down upon as a poor vile creature by those that knew him not, he gathered but a few morsels of dry crusts; but Brother Masseo was given many large pieces of bread and even entire loaves, for he was tall and handsome. And having begged, they met together to eat outside the city at a spot where there was a fountain and beside it a fair broad stone, whereon each laid the alms he had collected. Now when St. Francis saw that the pieces of bread brought by Brother Masseo were finer and larger than his own, he rejoiced exceedingly and spake thus: 'O Brother Masseo, we are not worthy of so great a treasure!' And when he had said this several times, Brother Masseo answered: 'Dearest Father, how can that be called treasure where there is poverty so great and such lack of needful things? Here is neither cloth, nor knife, nor trencher, nor bowl, nor house, nor table, nor man-servant, nor maid-servant.' Then said St. Francis, 'This is what I hold to be great treasure, where there is naught made ready by human hands, but all that we have is prepared by Divine Providence, as is manifest in the loaves we have collected, in this table of stone so beautiful and in this fountain so clear; and for this I would that we should pray God that He may make us to love with all our hearts this noble treasure of Holy Poverty that hath God Himself for Servitor.' After these words and having made their prayer, they refreshed their bodies and rose up and journeyed onwards. And coming to a church, he said to his companion, 'Let us enter into this church to pray.' And St. Francis goes behind the altar and kneels in prayer. And as he prayed he was inspired by the Divine Presence with so great fervour that his whole soul was afire with love of Holy Poverty; in

such wise that from the hue of his face and the strange opening of his lips it seemed that flames of love were bursting from him ; and coming thus aflame to his companion, he cried to him, ' Ah, ah, ah, Brother Masseo, give thyself to me ! ' And so said he thrice ; and the third time St. Francis lifted up Brother Masseo into the air with his breath and cast him away from him the length of a tall spear ; whereat Brother Masseo was filled with amaze, and after related to his companions that when St. Francis thus lifted him up and cast him from him with his breath, he felt such deep consolation from the Holy Spirit that never in his life had he felt the like.

" Then said St. Francis, ' Dearest companion, let us go to St. Peter and St. Paul and pray them to teach us to possess this boundless treasure of Holiest Poverty ; for it is a treasure of such exceeding worth and so divine that we are unworthy to possess it in our vile selves. Yea, this is that heavenly virtue whereby all earthly and transitory things are trodden under foot and every hindrance is removed from the soul that she may be freely conjoined with the eternal God. This is the virtue that maketh the soul, while yet on earth, to have communion with the angels ; that companioned Christ on the Cross, with Christ was buried, with Christ arose again and with Christ ascended into Heaven. She is the virtue also that easeth the flight unto Heaven of all the souls that love her ; for she guards the armour of true humility and charity. . . ."

Many have sought for that clear fountain, that fair broad stone and that altar of revelation, and some, perhaps, have found them ; but the earthly spot as yet is unidentified and its secret is incommunicable, except unto the few.

CHAPTER XII

The Lateran Council—St. Francis and St. Dominic—St. Francis's Mission to the East—The Crisis in the Order—The Rule.

FOR a brief space we must hark back and leave Franciscan Italy, in order that our history may be clear. In 1215 Pope Innocent, full of great schemes for the extension of his temporal authority and for the quickening of the spiritual life within the Church, had summoned a General Council to the Lateran in order to proclaim a new Crusade for the liberation of the Holy Places from the Moslem. The Church in unprecedented numbers had responded to his call. The Pope's appeal had been a splendid triumph, in its eloquence, its mystic vision and its passionate sincerity. Seldom in history has intellectual and moral greatness been wedded to such greatness of occasion, as when this great pontiff expounded to the assembled prelates of all Christendom the mystic parallels of the ninth chapter of Ezekiel, dwelling on the meaning of the symbol Tau, that he, the man clothed in linen, was ordained to place upon the foreheads of those that grieved for the abominations of the world. He described the miseries of the Holy Places and the apathy and sin of the Christian nations, that were to be re-inspired by faith for the tremendous undertaking. The resolutions of this Council have caused it to be called the great reforming Council of the Middle Ages; the Crusade was to be proclaimed, the Curia purged, the Clergy purified of old abuses; if these designs had been put into execution possibly the later schism might have been avoided. Unfortunately for mankind, it failed to execute its resolutions, and within but a few months the great Pope was dead, in the vigour of his manhood and the fullness of his opportunity. Two saints were present at the great Council, Francis and Dominic; its inspiration can be traced on the careers of both.

The meeting of the saints was the outcome of a dream that came to Dominic, in which he and another unknown man were

presented to Christ by the Blessed Virgin, as messengers of grace unto the world. On the following day he, meeting Francis, recognized him as his fellow-messenger. "You are my comrade," he cried, as he embraced him. "Let us run together and no enemy shall ever overcome us!"

To run together was not their spiritual destiny; they had started too far apart—the one, to convert the heretics by the power of reason; the other, to convert the worldly by the power of love. Yet whenever they met upon their road they were singularly at one.

The next occasion was again in Rome at a conference with Cardinal Ugolino, who was anxious to persuade them to allow their followers to be elevated to the episcopacy, an honour which each one, for a different reason, humbly but decisively declined. In substance, Dominic said, "'My brethren are already prelates"; Francis, "My brethren are Minores." As they went out together, Dominic begged for Francis's cord and girt himself with it. From Francis also probably he took the Rule of Mendicancy; from Dominic, Francis's followers took their theological schools.

For although the contrast betwixt the two great saints exists it has been greatly overdrawn. Was it not Dominic who at time of famine sold his books for bread to feed the poor, and once even offered to sell himself into slavery to the Moors in order to redeem a captive with a family to support? Did he not even persuade a haughty prelate to lay aside his robes and go barefoot to a conference with heretics, armed only with the humility of the Gospel, and, refusing to countenance the secular war against erring fellow-Christians, trust to convert them by the word of God in the mouths of men who lived according to its precepts? Could any method be more "Franciscan"?

Again, too much has been made of Francis's distrust of learning as the best means of converting the populace to penitence. The "Speculum Perfectionis" has a pretty story of a novice who came to the saint repeatedly with a plea to be allowed to possess a Psalter. To the young man's eager importunity he at first gave way, but afterwards retracted the permission. "For if to-day thou have a Psalter," said he, "to-morrow thou wilt need a Breviary, and then thou wilt sit in thy stall like a great prelate and say to thy brother, 'Go, fetch me my Breviary!'"

Nevertheless, it was not the reading of the Breviary that he disapproved, but the intellectual pride that so often goes with learning, signs of which he probably discerned in the eager insistence of that novice. It was not study, but the store set on it that he condemned. When reading a book himself he would often pause to meditate, for in each phrase he found a world of wonder, since he weighed it in relation to inestimable things. For the rest, one should not forget how remote from life were often the problems of the mediæval schools. Francis could only feel the lifelessness of academic abstractions and logical refinements in contrast to his own deep insight into the beauty of the natural world and the shining world of spiritual realities. On the other hand, he ever deeply respected men who, like Brother Peter of Cataneo, carried their learning humbly and tactfully. In short, his "prejudice," if one may so term it, was no more than a poet's protest against pedantry. He sought to move by example rather than by argument; to charm rather than convince.

From this "prejudice" naturally Dominic was free, for he had been brought up in the Schools. His mission was to a different class, his natural field of combat was the pulpit and the university, whereas Francis's was the street, the market-place. Thus the two saints were complementary to each other; they ran by diverse paths to the same goal.

It is said locally that they met near the Gate of St. Angelo in Perugia; in exquisite effigy they stand embraced over a door of the Loggia of S. Paolo in Florence; and together they live for all men's worship in Dante's "Paradise." But it is a curious comment on the great Pope's prophecy, that the two men marked with the sacred Tau for the awakening of the nations should have been, although unregarded, present at the Council.

II

It is hazardous to describe as a failure any action in the life of a great saint; yet difficult not to regret Francis's mission to the Moslems of Egypt. It affords a shining example of his fearlessness and adds a romantic chapter to his legend, but practically its results were meagre, it ruined his constitution by infection of malaria and his eyes with the disease that eventually brought blindness; while, on the other hand, his

two years' absence was the season of the first dissensions in his Order.

It was probably at the Lateran Council that Francis was inspired to attempt to do by heavenly means, that is by preaching and example, what human might was failing to accomplish by the sword. That the Pope's great sermon moved him, we can surely argue from the importance that the mystic Tau has thenceforward in his life. It was shortly after this that Pacifico saw it in vision emblazoned on his forehead, and later it became for him a sort of signature. It symbolized the headless Cross, the instrument of suffering, before Pilate set the writing over it with the name of Christ.

Already Francis had made two vain attempts to reach the heathen; the first had ended in shipwreck on the Dalmatian coast and the second in illness in Spain. It was not until nearly five years after the Lateran Council that he was able to carry out his desire. He left the affairs of the Order in the hands of two Vicar-Generals, one of whom was to remain at the Portiuncula and the other to travel and visit the many convents of the Order. He sailed for the East from Ancona on the Feast of St. John the Baptist 1220, taking with him twelve brethren, Peter Cataneo among them. They arrived at the camp of the Crusaders on the eve of an attack upon the fortress of Damietta, and Francis, ashamed and deeply grieved at the open profligacy of the Christian army, warned the princes that the attack would be unsuccessful. They laughed him to scorn, attacked and were repulsed with a loss of six thousand slain. A truce for the burying of the dead was sought and granted, a circumstance of which Francis took advantage in order to pass over to the Sultan's camp.

He was accompanied on this perilous enterprise by Illuminato. On the way they met two lambs, which afforded them great consolation in the light of the promise: "Behold I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves." Awed possibly by the friars' strange appearance, the Moslem guards let them pass through and they were brought, as they desired, into the presence of the Sultan, Malek-el-Kamil. To him and his Court Francis expounded the Gospel of Christ in the *lingua franca*, possibly his favourite Provençal. The Sultan was probably diverted by the strangeness of the occurrence, but he recognized in the herald's bearing the signs of no ordinary faith, and caused him to be courteously treated.

There was a second audience. This time before the Sultan's throne was spread a carpet covered with crosses. "If he treads upon them, we will convict him of irreverence to the holy symbols of his creed; if he does not, of discourtesy to me," the Sultan said. Francis incurred the former charge by stepping forward without hesitation. "You must remember there were three crosses," he said boldly; "we have the true Cross; what you have must be the thieves'." The Sultan was delighted and pressed him to remain with him.

But Francis's condition was that the Sultan and all his court should embrace the Christian faith, or put to the test the truth of the two creeds. Let a great fire be lighted into which he and the Moslem priests should enter, or, if the latter were afraid, he would enter it alone. "If I am burnt up, impute it to my sins; if I am saved, acknowledge Christ to be God and Saviour of all."

The Moslem priests were shy; the Sultan wavered. Had he a thrill of pity for the eager little friar? At least he shunned the logic of the crude dilemma, and sent the dialectian back into the Christian camp.

III

But during Francis's absence in the East, the storm, long-threatening, broke. The Order had now come to a parting of the ways. The exquisite life of the Founder and his first companions, of that inner circle of his knights within the orbit of his influence, was not possible for the ever-widening circles, extending so rapidly over Italy and all western Europe. Was the clear spring to spread in unchecked freedom, to be lost in a quagmire breeding heresy and rebellion, or to be dyked and channelled according to tried rules and known traditions? Was not the Order to be organized?

In the first place, the very originality of Francis, that singular blend of love and chivalry, was a cause why those, who donned his habit without knowing him, should have a cruder and more commonplace conception of his message. What was so hard for the few around him, was surely far more difficult for the many who never met him, who had not even our advantages of knowing him through the records of his most devoted intimates. Of the hundreds and thousands brought into his Order by his missionaries, converts of every

rank and trade and a dozen different languages, can we expect that more than a tithe were spiritually his brothers? The primitive Order was indeed a school for saints.

Secondly, let us consider the position of the Church, that had accorded, perhaps too readily, permission to these barefoot wanderers to preach the Gospel in her name without any regular inquiry into their reading of her doctrines. At this time there was not even a novitiate. Imagine the doubts of the local hierarchies, ecclesiastical and secular, who dreaded, the one, a new vehicle of heresy, and the other a new element of disorder. All hostile influences that we found opposed to Francis after his first successes in his native town, were naturally far stronger in more worldly and sceptical lands. It was manifest that a stricter organization and a more practical rule of life were necessitated by the continual expansion of the Order, not only in the interest of the Church and the world outside, but also for the preservation of its own essential life.

It is only natural that the first companions of this wondrous Gospel chivalry should regard with jealous anger all changes in its Rule; the very fervour of their faith, enabling them to follow it, prevented them from admitting its impracticability for large numbers. They did not see that with every convert the practical difficulties of all increased and the average intensity of faith diminished. It is obvious that many of the free knights may even have resented, as treacheries to Poverty, concessions to the weaker vessels and restrictions of their own peculiar liberty. Moreover, it is clear that we must sympathize with them, we who are particularly attracted by their romantic charm. But we must not let the poetry blind us to the perspective; which is perhaps what many modern writers on Franciscan themes have done. For the Churchmen of the day were not primarily concerned with the ideals of a handful of spiritual exquisites, but with the preservation of the faith and the salvation of the many. In these circumstances, we are persuaded that among our many debts to the Papacy of the thirteenth century not the least is that, while rendering the Franciscan Order possible, it preserved to us so large a part of its spiritual treasure. This we owe especially to two great men: Cardinal Ugolino, afterwards Gregory IX, and Vicar, afterwards Minister-General, Elias.

The earliest Rule, verbally sanctioned by Pope Innocent,

consisted of little more than a few verses of the Gospel, to which had been added special regulations from time to time as necessity arose. Francis was a poet and not a man of rules. Such ordinances as those of fasting, which are binding on all Catholics, were accepted as not requiring gloss or repetition. But while Francis was in the East, his Vicars promulgated a new ordinance which, among many other restrictions, ordered the brethren to abstain from meat at all times, except on Sundays and feastdays. As soon as these new rules were issued, a certain lay Brother put a copy of them in his pocket and without asking leave of anyone went to seek Francis over the sea. He arrived just as the latter with Peter of Cataneo was sitting down to dinner, and on the table before them was a dish of meat. They looked at one another in silence for awhile; then said Francis, "Let us eat what is set before us, according to the Gospel." After dinner they set out for home.

The tactless pretensions of the Vicars and their rigours with regard to unessentials had rapidly brought the Order into the direst confusion. Many of the more recent converts had thrown off their vows and returned to their life in the world. Others had seceded and started unauthorized sects, more or less schismatic, even heretical. Others again had taken refuge in distant hermitages to watch events and pray for the Founder's return. If such were the results of his temporary absence, what would follow on his death, unless a more definite organization were created?

Francis and Peter, passing through Acre, brought along with them Elias, Provincial Minister for Syria, and also a certain young German convert of his, Cæsar of Spires. Thus Francis had with him on his return to Italy the three most able Brothers at that time in the Order. They sailed in a Venetian ship and on landing made their way to Bologna, where Francis found that the Provincial of Lombardy had erected a school and a large convent, which he refused to enter, even insisting on its evacuation. The trouble was adjusted—probably by Elias and Cardinal Ugolino. It was the month of August, and Ugolino carried him off for a brief rest to the well-known hermitage at Camaldoli, situated amid glorious forests on a mountain in Tuscany, within a few miles of his own Alvernia. The white-robed monks of St. Romualdo will show you the cell which he inhabited next to that occupied

by Ugolino. If the other Brothers, especially Elias, were also with them, this little conference probably had an immense importance for the Order. In any case, Francis went hence direct to Orvieto, where Pope Honorius was residing, and sat down on the doorstep of the Episcopal Palace, too humble to ask admittance, until the Pope, coming out, accosted him—just at the door of the old palace to the east of the cathedral (though neither the present Duomo nor the splendid Papal Palace were yet built). Francis asked the Pope to give him a Cardinal as Protector, as a sort of Papal Vicegerent of the Order, and on his consent named Ugolino. Perhaps he also related to him his dream of the little black hen.

It was now that with the help of Cæsar of Spires he proceeded to draw up a Rule, and, in order to promulgate it, summoned a Chapter to meet at the Portiuncula on Pentecost of the following year. Peter of Cataneo was appointed Vicar, but died before the Chapter met. Elias was appointed in his stead.

The number of the Brothers, over three thousand, that came from all parts to the Portiuncula, indicates the great anxiety that there had been in the Order and the joy of celebrating the return of Francis. The weather was hot, so for protection from the sun the whole plain around the tiny shrine was covered with little mats of reeds, hoisted on short poles, whence the assembly is called " the Chapter of Mats." Elias sat in a large chair with Francis at his feet ; whenever the latter had something he wished to say, he would pull the Vicar-General's habit, when the latter would stand up and cry, " Thus says Brother Francis." It was doubtless he whom all wanted to hear ; but his health would not let him address them. None the less, the Chapter was a real success in so far as it went off happily. " Who can express," writes Jordan of Giano ecstatically, " the charity, patience, humility, obedience and fraternal merriment that were among the brethren at that time ? "

But the new Rule gave little satisfaction to the dissidents ; it embodied Francis's Gospel Rule of Apostolic Poverty with so many precepts, homilies and exhortations that it was far too long and far from clear. The new regulations as to fasting were abolished and restrictions were placed upon the freedom of wandering friars.

Unfortunately the legally-minded would not let the matter

rest. The ascetically-minded were not content to fast themselves without forcing others to do likewise; and evil came not from the larger or the stricter reading, but from the discussions, differences and dissensions, groupings in parties, personal rancours, precipitated and embittered by such intellectual follies. At this point Francis had another dream; of the gathering from the ground of innumerable crumbs of bread to feed a multitude of brethren, and a Voice that called to him, to make of them one Host and so feed those that truly hungered.

So Francis went away with Leo to the tiny mountain hermitage of Fonte-Colombo, situated on the hills above the valley of Rieti. It is a solemn and very beautiful spot on the edge of a wooded cliff about an hour's climb to the south-west of the town. It had long been a favourite hermitage with Francis, who some seven years before had built a little chapel there in the name of St. Mary Magdalene. The chapel stands to-day but little changed, hard by the convent; the wood that surrounds it is held in peculiar veneration, as the Sinai of the Franciscan Order. Less than a hundred yards from the first is a second little chapel, dedicated to St. Michael, through which one descends by seven steps to a natural hole in the rock-face, about twelve feet long by three feet wide, a cleft rather than a cave. In this cleft Francis dwelt for forty days, keeping a fast in honour of St. Michael, after which he called Leo to his side and dictated to him the Rule.

According to the "Speculum Perfectionis" Elias and other ministers had grown anxious; they believed the Rule would be so severe that none of them would be able to observe it, and to the scandal of Leo they broke in upon the solitude and troubled the saint with questions. They were answered, says the "Speculum," by an audible Voice from Heaven. "Francis," It said, "naught in this Rule is thine, but all has origin from Me only; wherefore it is to be observed to the letter, without gloss; and he who wills not to fulfil it, let him go freely from the Order!"

Possibly this Rule was modified by Cardinal Ugolino; certainly some of the most characteristic features of the old Rule were omitted, especially the evangelical ordinance that when the Brothers were travelling they should carry neither scrip nor purse, nor bread nor money, neither a staff nor shoes to their feet. The Rule was ratified by Pope Honorius III in November 1223, and for all Franciscans, "brown or black

or bearded," it is the Rule to-day. The only question is its "large" or "strict" observance, the importance of which is due to the events that followed Francis's death. To him no doubt these legal troubles were a sore "trial," but it is foolish indeed to say they were his "tragedy." That was the Passion of his Saviour.

CHAPTER XIII

The Valley of Rieti—The Hermitage of Greccio.

I

THENCEFORWARD for about two years the centre of the Franciscan history is transported to the Valley of Rieti. Albeit nominally a part of Umbria, its landscape and its population differ in divers ways from those of the Valley of Spoleto. The scenery is at once more Alpine and more southern, the air clearer and brighter. Vanished is the delicate charm of dim blue distance, the diaphanous veil of scarcely perceptible mist that hovers even on the brightest morning over the valley where Clitumnus wanders with his many fellow-streams towards Bevagna; the plain is more open, the forests are larger, the mountains steeper and higher. The people seem less gentle and rather more independent than those of the sister-vale, being, in fact, mountaineers. Perhaps, if anything, they are more devout, and they will tell you that their land is signed with the four Franciscan shrines as with a cross: to the north Poggio Bustone, with its cave high up on the barren hills; to the south its "Sinai," Fonte Colomba on its solemn forest steep; to the east the high-perched convent hermitage of Greccio, its "Bethlehem"; to the west, amid pleasant groves and fertile undulations, La Foresta. Of these the dearest is Greccio, a spot that vies with La Verna, the Carceri, and S. Damiano for beauty of surroundings and vividness of memories.

There are three ways of approaching Greccio and all three are lovely. You may come up from Rome or the Abruzzi, that is from the south, through the quiet provincial city of Rieti, where you may see the house in which Angelo Tancredi lived when Francis dubbed him a Knight of Christ; the house in which Francis stayed in the days of his blindness and was consoled by a heavenly musician; the episcopal palace where he more than once resided; and the dark crypt of the eleventh-

THE CRYPT OF THE CATHEDRAL OF RIETI, ELEVENTH CENTURY

century cathedral in which he passed whole nights in prayer.

Or you may come from the north, from Terni, hard by the ravine where the Velino hurls itself over the Roman dyke in thundrous clouds of spray—the slave, alas! of a modern industrial city that pollutes the sky with the fumes of cannon foundries; and thence you may skirt the pretty little mountain lake of Piediluco and so emerge into the Reatine plain.

Or you may climb on foot or on mule-back over the ridge from the hermitage of Stroncone, to the south of Terni, and find the wonderful spot where Francis dwelt when he first came down to preach in the old feudal village, perched on a spur high up over the valley.

In any case, the inhabitants will point out to you the tiny chapel situated on the summit of the ridge above, and tell you how once a year the whole population climbs up in pilgrimage, and surely returns enlightened and enriched in spirit by the memory of one of the most glorious views in Italy.

Francis came down to the village to convert the savage people, who, it is said, were often punished for their impiety by wolves, that ate their cattle, or by hail, that smote their vines. The saint converted them; their torments ceased; in their gratitude they prayed him to establish a dwelling on the hill close to their village. He accepted, but on the condition that Providence should choose the site. A child was told to throw a lighted torch from the parapet of the castle; wherever it fell and burnt the soil should be the chosen place. The torch rose up into the air and flew across the valley, only descending on the opposite rocks at least half a mile away! The villagers and their castellan were doubtless disappointed, but Providence had chosen, as the miracle proclaimed. So on the narrow ledge of rock the brethren went to dwell in cells that were little more than shallow caves hollowed out of the face of the cliff with a wall built up on the side of the ravine to form a tiny oratory, a dormitory, say twelve feet by five, and below a scarcely wider cave to serve for a refectory.

Then in another cave but a few yards distant Francis on Christmas night of the year 1223 prepared the first "Presepio," or crib. An ox and an ass were stalled therein, with straw and hay in a manger, and all the people of the village were invited to come and see with torches and lanterns, singing their Christmas hymns. Francis, as deacon, served the Mass

and after the Gospel preached, when lo! in the manger the devout espied a new-born Child asleep! Thus was it manifested, says the chronicler, "how that when Jesus was long dead in the hearts of many present, yet by the grace and ministration of His servant, Francis, that night He was restored to life and vividly impressed on human memory." This is the meaning of the name of the "Franciscan Bethlehem."

Here too was it in this refectory, entering one Easter morning, Francis saw the table laid with unaccustomed luxury, with a linen cloth and vessels of glass, lent by a friend for the feast. He stole out quietly and borrowed an old hat and a staff, and knocking at the door as the Brothers were sitting down to meat begged alms like a poor sick pilgrim. So the Minister arose and gave him a platter, and he sat down on the ground near the fire. "Now am I seated like a Friar Minor," said he; "but when I saw the table so set out, I bethought me that it was not the table of poor religious who go daily from door to door for alms. For the feasts of the Lord and His Saints are rather honoured by poverty, by which they conquered Heaven, than by that superfluity which only made it more distant." Then were the friars ashamed and several wept; for their hearts had burned within them, says Celano, as did those of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus, when joined on the first Easter morning by a Pilgrim, who taught them, though they recognized Him not!

Later, it was in these same caves that the Three Companions, Leo, Angelo and Rufino, met to compose the Legend that goes by their name. In another cave a few feet farther eastwards the Ex-Minister-General John of Parma dwelt in retirement for two and thirty years. Then also came his successor, St. Bonaventure, and in his day a wall was built that enclosed as in a corridor the path of access, while the cave of the Presepio was made into a chapel and another tiny church with a perfect little choir was built above, together with a cluster of small cells like those of the Carceri. Later again, tall arches were built up from the rock ledges in the ravine below, and over them and in them rooms were made that form the chief part of the present convent. Finally, only ten years ago, a larger church was built a little to the west of the venerable sanctuary, though this is an addition few will see without regret.

As about the Carceri or S. Damiano, one may say that this

THE HERMITAGE OF GRECCIO

building is not so much a reliquary as a relic; but none the less certain objects are particularly precious. The chief is a portrait of the saint said to date back to 1225 and to have been painted by the hand of Giacoma da Settisoli. The figure holds a napkin to his eye and lifts the other hand in blessing. The stigmata are clearly visible. The features correspond to the description of Thomas of Celano and to the general impression of contemporary writers. Other relics are the habit of the Blessed John of Parma and the iron tongs with which Francis used to fashion the wafers to be consecrated in the Mass.

Within the convent dwell two Fathers and one lay Brother, busy with parish work among the peasants or with cultivating vegetables in the ravine below. With genial courtesy they bid the pilgrim welcome and offer the fresh produce of their labour. Around is a wonderful prospect over the whole Valley of Rieti as far as the heights of Terminillo and the range of the Alto Sasso in the Abruzzi. But, night or day, as one goes softly about the little stairs and corridors or watches the great view from the windows or the woods, what strikes one most of all perhaps is silence—silence made audible by myriad sounds and voices, echoes of distant life and labour in the populous fields below, carried up to the convent softly, distinctly, and, as it were, holily, through the steep interval of still clear air.

CHAPTER XIV

The Valley of the Upper Tiber and Alvernia—The Stigmata of St. Francis—Masseo's Letter—Leo's Keepsake—The Journey to the Portiuncula.

I

NOW, as the crowning moment of the Life draws on, we must explore the northern valley of the Franciscan province: the upper valley of the Tiber, the Valle Castellana, which leads up to Mount Alvernia. The Saint's possession of that lonely hill came about in the following way.

In 1212, when he made his first attempt to reach the East, he was wrecked off the Dalmatian Coast and shipped back to Ancona. Thence he proceeded through the Marches and the Romagna, preaching at every village on his road. In the spring of 1213 he was passing up the valley of the Marecchia above Rimini, not far from the heights of San Marino, when he heard that a great festival was being held at the Castle of Montefeltro, in honour of the knighting of a member of the house. This castle is believed to be S. Leo, a place of quite extraordinary natural strength, perched on an isolated crag surrounded by perpendicular cliffs, about seven miles from S. Marino and twenty-five north-east of La Verna. Hearing of the feast, Francis went thither and preached to the guests assembled in the castle court. His text was a rhyme: "Tanto è il bene ch' aspetto, Ogni pena m' è diletto." Among his audience was a certain Count Orlando of Chiusi (a small fief in eastern Tuscany), who was so deeply impressed by his fervour and sincerity that he was moved to consult him privately about his soul; and in gratitude for good counsel offered him the mountain, as a place most fit for contemplation, "all the land being covered with trees, with rocks and meadows from the summit down to the foot on every part."

Francis sent friars to take possession of it, and caused a little friary of huts to be made; afterwards with his own

ASSISI: THE VIEW TOWARDS PERUGIA

THE CASTLE OF ST. LEO

hands he erected a chapel, the dimensions for which were given him in a vision by the Madonna, as is told in a relief over the altar by Luca della Robbia.

The road by which he went to and fro between Assisi and Alvernia ascends the upper valley of the Tiber by Bosco and Civitella, in view of Monte Tezio and Monte Corona, to Umbertide and out into the wider plain at Città di Castello. Here he had several resting-places—the house of the Salamacchi in the heart of the city opposite to the Monte di Pietà to-day, and the hermitage of Buonriposo, an old convent, now abandoned, about three miles to the west of the town, in a fold of Monte S. Angiolino, with an outlook from its wooded glen northwards to La Verna and southwards down the Tiber Valley to Mount Subasio. It was in the latter place that Francis found "Good Rest" the first time he passed up to his holy mountain; to the former he was brought back after the stigmatization.

About six miles along the driving road towards Borgo S. Sepolcro is a tiny chapel amid pine-trees, close to the Villa Graziani; here, it is held, the saint once passed a night. Farther on, before the road reaches S. Giustino, is a fountain with a shrine; the water is said to have burst forth at his prayer. Further again, before reaching Borgo S. Sepolcro, is the Chapel of S. Lazzaro, where formerly was the lazaret at which in his weariness he once inquired how long was yet his way. So are the smallest traces of him treasured!

Citerna, the little city that one sees high up to the left of the road, has a large cross on the summit of its castle-hill to mark the spot where Francis preached in 1214. Tradition adds two very curious miracles. The place was infested with ants; the holy man bade them depart and they obeyed. The sermon was interrupted by a woman dancing and clashing cymbals; the saint bade her desist, and on her refusal commended her to the devil, whereupon in sight of all the town she was caught up into the air and never seen again! Thus does popular fancy work around his name!

High up on the mountain in a ravine to the right of the road, about a mile before one reaches S. Sepolcro, runs the way to Monte Casale, a charming little hermitage which the Capuchins still keep in a primitive simplicity that inevitably recalls the Carceri of Mount Subasio. Here is a chapel Francis used, little more than a cave hollowed out of the rock; also

his "bed," a crucifix that he carried, and certain human skulls, "of the Robbers" one is told. Their tale is one of the most charming in the "Fioretti."

It relates how once when Francis was passing by the place, where stood at that time a feudal castle, a noble and delicate youth approached him with request to be taken into his Order. Notwithstanding his delicacy, the saint accepted him on account of his earnestness, gave him the name of Angelo and afterwards made him warden of the friary. A short time later three robbers came asking for food, which the young warden refused, courageously reproaching them for their evil mode of life. But when he reported his action to Francis he was not commended, but enjoined to go after them with bread and wine, to kneel down before them and ask forgiveness for having spoken so discourteously! Angelo did as he was commanded, and the hearts of the robbers were touched to see how he made amends for so small a fault as having spoken to them as they deserved, whereas they had robbed and even murdered men without remorse or fear of punishment. So they repented and came to Francis, seeking how they might save their sinful souls, and he took them into the Order. But the story should be read in the twenty-sixth chapter of the "Fioretti," together with the wondrous dream that one of them dreamed before he died.

Borgo S. Sepolcro too—besides its few fine pictures, an Adoration of the Magi by Bassano, a Crucifixion by Signorelli, and the famous fresco of the Resurrection by Pier della Francesca—has also its Franciscan memories. The first time the saint passed by, the city offered him a site on which to found a friary, and the last time he returned after the stigmatization it went forth in one crowd to greet him with boughs of olive, hymns and cries of welcome. But the saint rode on in ecstasy, unconscious of the clamour, though the people kissed and tore his habit in their fervour. But coming at last to the lazaret a mile beyond the city, suddenly the vision left him and he awoke and asked how far was it yet to the Borgo?

From Borgo S. Sepolcro the direct road follows the Tiber to the east of Monte Fungaie up to the little city of Pieve S. Stefano, whence over slight undulations and then a rocky desert one ascends to the mountain of Alvernia. But another and more Franciscan way crosses the valley to Anghiara,

passes not far from the castle of Montacuto—where Francis rested three days on his last journey towards the Portiuncula, after the stigmatization—up to Caprese, where once on his first journey he slept with his companions in a ruined church and, falling into an ecstasy, was seen to be uplifted bodily into the air.

On the following morning, being too exhausted to proceed on foot, a donkey was procured for him, whose peasant owner asked him if he were truly that Friar Francis of whom he had heard so much, and admonished him to be as good as he was said to be. Ill as he was, the saint leapt from the saddle and fell on his knees before the man who had read him such a lesson! For this same man upon this journey he caused a spring of water to rise up in the desert, as Giotto has depicted in a famous fresco in the Upper Church.

Farther along this road, close to the destination, stands a chapel to mark the spot where hundreds of birds came round the saint to greet him, settling upon his arms and shoulders and on the ground before him and with singing and fluttering of wings expressed their joy. Such was St. Francis's welcome to Alvernia.

II

According to St. Matthew at the moment of the Passion "the earth quaked and the rocks were rent" upon Mount Calvary; according to tradition it was revealed to Francis that at the same hour the cliffs were torn upon the holy mountain of Alvernia, and thus a place prepared for another crucifixion. Visible against the northern sky from the hill-tops of the whole of Umbria, this Calvary of Franciscan story forms the most northerly point of our "Franciscan Italy," as its Sinai, Fonte Colomba, the most southern; spiritually too it is its culmination. Lacking Alvernia, the Franciscan province would be little more than a consecrated garden; without the act accomplished on it, perhaps one might almost humanly explain the life.

The six or seven miles of somewhat difficult ascent from Bibbiena or S. Stefano still sets the holy mountain apart from the world, and it is in reverent mood that the visitor enters the convent court and is greeted by the friars, inspects the great church, the many chapels and exquisite works of Della Robbia; and then passes out on to the rocks with

their views, their wealth of vegetation and their legends—with all the while a spell stealing over his soul. To the merest Pagan the place is mysterious, "uncanny"; for in truth it is a shrine of "holy fear." One looks over terrific precipices, haunted by perilous whirlwinds; through clefts and chasms, rent by gigantic cataclysms; one stares aghast at tremendous boulders poised aloft in air, and huge rocks hurled and sustained in places that seem to set gravity at defiance. In certain caverns it appears as if the towering cliffs must fall together, unless upheld by some unearthly force. The miracles related are but a part of the surroundings; it is as though the place were ruled, not by the laws of our natural order, but by direct presidence of supernatural power. One looks up at the glorious trees, great beeches soaring a hundred feet, and down on the moss and ferns clothing the creviced rocks with verdure, and out across the radiant air to half the sunlit hills of Italy; but one cannot free one's soul from the awe of an overwhelming Presence; one lingers, listens, wonders, with heart and mind subdued.

After a simple supper one retires to a cell; soon after midnight comes a summons, which one obeys as in a dream. One is led through long, lightless corridors, dormitories silent and deserted, into the great convent church—dark, except for a dim radiance from the choir. The friars behind the altar screen are chanting Matins; a single figure is moving round the nave, prostrating himself before the Stations of the Cross. After Matins come Lauds, and then the tapers on the altar are extinguished and from the choir a large wooden cross advances, borne by a tall novice with on either side a lantern carried upon a pole. The friars follow in two long files, chanting softly, moving slowly; the great doors of the church are thrown open and the procession goes out into the night. It passes through the porch, and enters a cloister, at the end of which is the Chapel of the Stigmata. The friars, to the number of about sixty, fall upon their knees; after a short service and a solemn pause of silence, the kneelers rise and the procession returns in the same order and manner as it came.

So has it gone and so returned, night after night, winter and summer, for seven centuries; until comparatively recent times there was no cloister, wall or roof to shelter it across that open hundred yards of storm or snow. Twice only in

all those years have the hearts of the friars failed them, and of one of those two occasions they tell a pretty legend, how in the snow on the following morning were found the prints of the feet of thousands of birds and little animals, who had gone in a procession in their stead! Young and old alike, the friars all attend; there is no dispensation; for that which they celebrate is held to be the Sign-Manual of God on human flesh.

III

In the summer of the year 1224, two years before his death, Francis passed many days upon the holy mountain of Alvernia, days that were signalized by signs and wonders. Often he was so rapt to God that he was seen by his companions "to be lifted bodily from the ground and ravished out of himself," and often he was comforted by angels. By one of these he was assured that his Order should never fail from off the earth until the Day of Judgment and "none shall be so great a sinner, but that if he love the Order in his heart, he shall find mercy in God's sight." By another he was so consoled with music that the celestial bow being drawn once upward across the viol, he was "so ravished by the melody that he doubted lest his soul should have parted from his flesh by reason of the unbearable sweetness," if the bow had been drawn downwards again across the strings.

Warned of the approach of a still greater wonder, and anxious to guard himself from interruption, he changed his cell to a more distant cleft, that was out of earshot from the cells of the other friars. At first, we are told, the Powers of Hell made war on him and once the Demon strove to fling him down over the precipice, but he clung to a rock, the "Sasso Spicco," which received him into itself. Besides angelic spirits, he was comforted by birds, and especially by a faithful falcon, which would waken him at the Matin-hour by her singing, but whenever he was ailing or unusually weary, would "like a discreet and compassionate comrade" call him a little later. For his sustenance, Leo had orders to come to him once a day with bread and water and again by night at the Matin-hour; to pause at the bridge over the gulf that gave access to his hiding-place, repeat the opening phrase of the Matin office as password, and await a countersign. If it were given he might come forward and they would

say the office together; if not, he was to depart in silence to his cell. So it was that Francis kept his fast of forty days in honour of St. Michael, from the Feast of the Assumption, on the fifteenth day of August, until the last day of September.

Now Leo watched, and one night, while the saint was in ecstasy, a flaming Torch hung in the air above his head, and a Voice proceeded from it, though he heard not what was said. But Francis knew of Leo's presence, and when the Vision had departed, reproached him for coming, yet told him all that had passed. For in his soul two lights were manifested: one, knowledge of himself; and the other, knowledge of the Creator; and Christ had asked him for three gifts and he, thrusting his hand thrice into his bosom, had found three balls of gold—Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity—which he had offered and had known accepted. Finally, it had been shown to him that God should do to him marvellous things, such as had never yet been done to any creature in the world.

The promise was fulfilled on the Feast of the Holy Cross, the fifteenth of September, two hours before daybreak, when he was meditating upon the Passion; and the fervour of devotion waxed so great within him "that he was transformed into the likeness of Christ." For suddenly he beheld a Seraph with six flaming wings, coming down from Heaven; and in the midst was the form of a Man nailed to a Cross, with two wings extended above His Head, two covering His Body, and two outspread in flight. Then Francis's heart was filled with joy and grief unspeakable, for the Vision revealed to him certain secrets, which, while he lived, he never would divulge, and left in his heart a burning flame and in his flesh a marvellous image and imprint of the Passion of Christ.

His hands and feet were pierced by the semblance of nails, whose heads were seen on the palms and the upper side of the feet, round, black and protruding; and the points emerged, on the backs of the hands and the soles of the feet, as though formed in flesh, bent round and distorted; while in his right side was an open wound, inflamed and bleeding, whence often would issue blood and water, staining his tunic and his garments. Thenceforward he could walk no more, nor use his hands except with difficulty; so that in spite of his desire to conceal the miracle "lest divulgence should diminish grace," it soon was manifest to all about him. For Leo had

ROCKS AT LA VERNA

daily to change the swathings of the wounds, to ease the pain and staunch the blood that issued from his side. Masseo and Angelo, Rufino and Illuminato, and not long afterwards Elias, saw and touched them, while many another guessed what these were privileged to see. Until his death, to please the saint, the stigmata remained a secret, to be passed from man to man as a sacred mystery. But after his death the marks were seen by thousands, of whom the testimony of many has come down to us to-day. Countless have been the efforts to explain away the mystery; historians have criticized the evidence; doctors have tried to diagnose the phenomena. But the historical fact remains, unshaken by their ingenuity, one of the best-attested marvels of all time.

IV

Filled with thanksgiving for the honour that had been accorded him, Francis composed and with his own hand wrote a brief ecstatic Praise to God, recalling the "Te Deum." In its original form, which was afterwards lengthened and expanded, it runs as follows:

"Thou alone art holy, the Lord God, that doest wonders. Thou art strong; Thou art great; Thou art the Most High. Thou art the Almighty King, the holy Father, the King of Heaven and Earth. Thou art threefold and one Lord God, Thou art good, all good, the highest good, the living and true Lord God. Thou art Charity; Thou art Love. Thou art Wisdom; Thou art Humility; Thou art Patience; Thou art Safety; Thou art Rest. Thou art Joy and Gladness; Thou art Justice and Temperance. Thou art all riches in abundance."

Leo was passing through a period of spiritual discouragement, due probably to his sense of the great gulf fixed between the holiness of the man he loved and his own unworthiness. We are told that when Francis in his transports was lifted from the earth, Leo would run softly forward and embrace his feet. The act might be taken as a symbol. Francis intuitively understood; so, having written down these praises, he turned over the leaf and on the back inscribed the blessing out of the Book of Numbers:

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord show His face to thee and have mercy upon thee; the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." To which he added, "The Lord bless thee, Brother Leo,"

and signing it with the mystic Tau, a headless cross emerging from a hill with a roughly drawn skull, he gave the parchment to Leo, with the injunction that he should never part with it.

For us the keeper made it doubly precious by his testimony to its authenticity. In red ink in his small neat handwriting he endorsed it as follows:

"Two years before his death the Blessed Francis kept a fast of forty days in the hermitage of Alvernia, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and of the Blessed Archangel Michael, from the Feast of the Blessed St. Mary until the Feast of St. Michael in September. And the Hand of God was laid upon him through the vision and speech of a Seraph and the marks of the stigmata of Christ upon his body. He made these praises written on the other side of this leaf and wrote them with his own hand, giving praise to the Lord for the great benefit accorded him."

And in the middle of the sheet he wrote, "The Blessed Francis wrote this blessing with his own hand for me, Brother Leo." And at the bottom of the sheet he wrote, "Likewise he made this sign Tau and the head with his own hand."

This precious relic was left by Leo on his deathbed to the Sacro Convento, where he died; it may be seen in the Treasury of the Basilica. If we except a letter written to Leo, which after passing through various vicissitudes is now preserved in the Duomo of Spoleto, this is the only authenticated piece of Francis's writing that has come down to us. It is also the strongest documentary evidence for the reality of the stigmata.

But we have another contemporary testimony in the letter of Elias, written to the Provincial Ministers on the night after the death of the saint, containing a detailed description of the stigmata, so minute as to lead us to suppose that it was intended to meet the objections of sceptics. These details are carefully given in the first Life of the saint by Thomas of Celano, which was completed in 1228, when the thousands of witnesses who had seen the dead body at the Portiuncula were still living, and they are again repeated by St. Bonaventure in his official "Legend," for the compilation of which use was made not only of this biography, but also of many other contemporary memoirs written by those who had known Francis.

But earlier evidence still is this letter of Masseo, which sums up the tale of La Verna in the saint's farewell. I give it in its entirety.

" Jesu. Mary. My Hope. Brother Masseo, sinner, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, companion of Brother Francis of Assisi, a man most dear to God, peace and health to all the brethren and sons of the great patriarch, Francis, Ensign of Christ.

" The great patriarch, having resolved to take a last farewell of this holy mountain on the 30th of September 1224, the day of the Feast of St. Jerome, Count Orlando of Chiusi sent him an ass that he might ride, since he could not put his feet to the ground, for they were wounded and pierced with nails. In the early morning, having heard Mass in St. Mary of the Angels " (the chapel Francis had erected at La Verna), " he called all the Brothers into the oratory and commanded them by obedience that they should always love one another, should watch and pray and ever have care of this place and ever say an office in it night and day. Moreover he commended to them the whole of this sacred mountain, exhorting all his Brothers now and in the future never to allow this place to be profaned, but to hold it ever in respect and reverence. And to me he said, ' Brother Masseo, my will is that on this mountain there dwell God-fearing Brothers, the best of my Order, and therefore it behoves the superiors to station here only the best of the Brothers. Ah ! Ah ! Ah ! Brother Masseo ! I say no more.' Then he commanded me, Brother Masseo, Brother Angelo, Brother Silvestro and Brother Illuminato to have special care of the spot where had come to pass that great marvel of the impress of the Holy Stigmata. And then, ' Adieu, adieu, adieu, Brother Masseo ! ' he said ; and turning to Brother Angelo, he said, ' Adieu, Adieu ! ' And the like he said to Brother Silvestro and Brother Illuminato. ' Peace be with you, my dearest sons. Adieu ! I go far from you in the body, but I leave my heart with you. I go away with Brother Pecorello di Dio to St. Mary of the Angels and I come not back again. I go away. Adieu ! Adieu to all ! Adieu, Holy Mountain ! Mount Alverna ! Mount of the Angels ! Adieu, dearest Brother Falcon ! I thank thee for the love thou borest me. Adieu, Adieu, Sasso Spicco ! Never again shall I come to visit thee. Adieu, adieu, rock that receivest me into thine entrails while thou mockedst the demon ! We shall never see each other again. Adieu, St. Mary of the Angels ! To thee, Mother of the Eternal Word, do I commend my sons.'

" While he said these words, our eyes were pouring floods of tears for him our dear father going from us. He, weeping also, carried away our hearts. Truly orphaned were we by the departure of such a father.

" I, Brother Masseo, have written this with tears. The blessing of God be upon us ! "

V

The long fast ended at the Feast-day of St. Michael, and the Count Orlando came from his castle of Chiusi, but a few miles away, bringing an ass to carry Francis on his journey back to the Portiuncula. Together with Leo and a peasant Francis set out by the mountain-road, which, passing close

beside the home of their friend, winds down the little valley, between Mont' Altaccio on the west, and Monte Fungaie and Monte Rognosi, to the Castle of Montacuto. Here Francis rested for some days with another noble, Count Alberto Barbolani, who, asking for some memorial of him, obtained that most precious relic, the bloodstained habit that he wore when the impress of the Seraph was received. The Count sent down post-haste to Borgo S. Sepolcro for similar material and a new habit was made in the night, and the old one taken in exchange. Folded in silk and cloth of gold it was kept at Montacuto for two centuries, until the castle was destroyed in 1503 by the Signory of Florence, when the relic was transported with great ceremony to where it now is to be seen, though sadly rent by the pious mutilations, in the Franciscan Church of the Ognissanti in that city.

From Montacuto the saint rode down by Anghiara to Borgo S. Sepolcro, through which town he passed, in triumph, but unconscious, as we have related, and thence by S. Lazzaro to Monte Casale, in which exquisite place he rested and healed a brother of epilepsy. From Monte Casale to Città di Castello is about twelve miles; in the house of the Salamacchi in the heart of the city, opposite the Monte di Pietà of to-day, he remained some while, cast out a demon from a woman and healed a boy of a malignant sore. When he set out again, passing down the narrower valley of the Tiber, it was late in the year, and owing to an early fall of snow the little party were overtaken by the night at Tavernazze upon the open road. The muleteer was scantily clad and suffered cruelly, but Francis laid his wounded hand upon him, and revived and warmed him so that he slept in the mire and snow as if in his own house. The next evening, they drew near to the Portiuncula, and Leo saw a Cross of Fire over Francis's head.

CHAPTER XV

The Canticle of Brother Sun and its oft-mistaken Meaning.

I

IN the early summer after his return to Assisi, notwithstanding his many infirmities, Francis was seized with a new evangelizing fervour, and determined to set forth for the Valley of Rieti, whither the Pope had invited him, in order that he might be treated by a celebrated doctor for his eyes. As a first day's short journey he was carried by Masseo, Angelo, Leo and others of his dearest, to a tiny hut of reeds in the garden of S. Damiano, to have the comfort of converse with Clare. During the night, however, he was racked with fever and harassed by mice that, running over him continually, would not let him rest in peace. Praying for patience he was answered that he might well rejoice in his infirmities, seeing he was already safe, as though in Paradise. The assurance filled him with a sense of his unworthiness, yet with longing to give thanks for the ineffable gift.

"I will make a new song," he said in the morning; "a praise of all the creatures, which daily minister to us and without which we could not live, and among whom man much offendeth his Creator by reason of his gross ingratitude, though in the midst of so much grace and benefit." And again he said, "In the morning when the Sun ariseth, every man should praise God that did create him, for that by him are our eyes enlightened by day; but in the even when night cometh, every man should praise God for Brother Fire, for that by him are our eyes enlightened by night; for we all be as it were blind and the Lord by these two Brethren doth illumine us; wherefore for these especially and the other creatures which we daily use, ought we to praise the Creator." Thus relates the "Speculum Perfectionis," adding that he ever held the Sun above all other creatures as a nearer similitude to the Lord, Whom the Scripture calls "The Sun of Righteousness."

Thomas of Celano says that he invited the Creatures and the Elements to praise God their Creator in certain verses that he composed, " after the manner of the Three Children in the Fire," that is to say, on the model of the Benedicite. In form the verses resemble the little catches or " stornelli," to be heard any day in the fields of Umbria. In these there is a constant lilt or rhythm, continually recurrent, and especially marked in the cadence at the end of each line. But the lines are not necessarily of equal syllables, and they terminate more often in an assonance than in a rhyme.

Although the poem has often been translated, and notably by Matthew Arnold, its true meaning has often been overlooked, owing to insufficient care to treat it in relation to the thought and language of its period. The title explains the aim; these are the " Praises of the Creatures " and not merely the praise of man for them; and the Creatures consist of the Heavenly Bodies and the Four Elements; it is not a question here of " our brothers and sisters " the animals and birds.

The Heavenly Bodies in the days of Francis were regarded as animated and intelligent, moved by angelic guidance, devoid of free will, but possessed of distinct and peculiar virtues. Through these virtues they were linked with the several metals and the various dispositions of animals and men. As for the Elements—Earth, Air, Fire, Water—universal mediæval opinion endowed them with spiritual life. They penetrated and composed the bodies of every object animate or inanimate, importing qualities and influences according to their nature. Moreover, these Elements were Powers that could be controlled by magic, since within certain qualitative limits they were free. They might be kindly and beneficent, or malignant, proud and cruel. But they could not be said to be men's brothers and sisters, any more than the angels could be so called. Mediæval ideas upon such matters were far more definite than those of the modern romanticist. It is surely illegitimate to substitute for Francis's world of thought the mental environment of some six centuries later. We may read into his hymn an echo of Aristotle and Ovid, but not a presage of Wordsworth and Rousseau. One can only treat Francis as a poet of Nature on condition that we conceive her as he did.

Actually, only one verse of the poem contains the possessive

pronoun "our," and that is in the praise of Mother Earth, "our mother" as he calls her, not "our sister," for she could clearly not be both! Also, in the later-added verse concerning Death, it is obviously "Sister our Bodily Death" that he speaks of and not "Our Sister Bodily Death."

We must not forget that Francis aggravated his blindness by constant weeping for his own unworthiness and that of the race of men. "No man is worthy to speak of Thee!" he cries; yet to praise God worthily was the object of his Order, his troubadours of God. But God is to be praised by that nobler Order, directly subject to a larger Rule, like his, but far more glorious, and bound together by a great Obedience, which by God's grace he had so often proved. Its General bears the Divine Likeness, since God is called "The Sun of Righteousness," and the title "Messer" or "Monsignor" that Francis gives him is the very word that he was wont to use in addressing his own ministers. Then come fair "Sister Moon" and the Stars—"Clarite" as he calls them, with surely a conscious play upon Clare's name—then the Elements—the Brothers Air and Wind and Cloud, and Sister Water, useful, lowly, precious and chaste, the embodiment of all the Franciscan virtues; then Brother Fire, strong and merry; and finally, Sister Earth, sustaining and directing, "mothering" us all, as Francis ever would that one member of each little settlement should do. Let these praise God in their power and their beauty, their joy, their serviceableness, their obedience and humility!

He vindicates the "Creatures" from the charge of being cruel. He forgets the harsh bitterness of Wind as he sweeps over the frozen Apennine; the persistent indifference of Water, as she drenches down on the flooded fields, corrupts the corn in the sodden earth, brings mildew, murrain and migraine and excites the rheum and the flux that drain the spirit of men. He forgives the hard rocks that Earth bears for so many leagues of Umbria and those wide tracts of her lean breast that will nourish naught but thistles, and the ugly rage of Fire, when, set on by barbarous armies, he ravages the homes of men and the rich fanes of God. He remembers only the usefulness and preciousness of Sister Water, on whom he would allow no one to tread when she had been cast out upon the ground, and who in return for courtesy would spring

up at his word in desert places and even, it is said, be changed to wine! While as for Brother Fire, did he not ever protect him, forbidding the brethren to quench with the foot a brand once kindled into flame? And did not this Brother in return deal gently with him at the terrible hour of his cauterization, and fulfil that cruel office without causing pain? "Consider," says St. Bonaventure, "how wondrous was the purity of this man, that at his beck Fire should temper its heat and Water change its flavour, angelic music give him solace and light from Heaven lead; thus it is evident that the whole frame of the world was obedient to the consecrated senses of this holy man."

These are the Brethren and Sisters that, members of a higher Order, he calls upon to praise his Lord as men could not do worthily. To his vision the world is no longer a chaos of separate and often contrary beings, angelic or demonic, controlled by magic charms or irresponsible unmoral influences —such as it was to his contemporaries; nor yet an unconscious mechanism of blind interacting forces—such as it is to many minds to-day; but rather a great religious Brotherhood of willing creatures, saying their daily office and following their obedience to a glorious Rule, of which Christ was the Author. The hymn is a hymn of Brotherhood through Service; of Nature, inasmuch as she is obedient to God.

II

LAUDES CREATURARUM

Most High, Omnipotent, good Lord! To Thee
The praises and the honour and the glory be!
All blessings, O Most High, befit Thee only,
And no man is worthy to speak of Thee!

Be praisèd, O My Lord, by all Thy creatures!
And chiefly by Monsignor Brother Sun,
Whom in the day Thou lightenest for us;
For fair is he and radiant with resplendence;
And of Thee, Most High, beareth he the semblance.

Be prais'd by Sister Moon and Stars of Night;
In Heaven Thou hast made them, precious, fair and bright.

Be praisèd, O My Lord, by Brother Wind,
By Air and Cloud and Sky and every Clime,
By whom Thou givest sustenance unto all kind!

Ja p̄ñ̄ laudet creaturay ḡs fear beat
frācisc ad laudē ⁊ honorē dei. cī cēr firm' apd
scīm dīm mū. ℣

Altissimu omnipotente bonsignore. tue

sole laude la gloria el honore ⁊ onne
benedictione.

Ad te solo altissimo se
Ronfano. ⁊ nullu homo
ene dignu te mētovare.

Laudato sie misignore cū tucte le tue crea
ture. spetialmēte m̄ messor lo frē sole. loqua
le ioi no ⁊ allumini noi p loi. Et ellu ell
ecliante cū grande splendore. de te altissi
mo portа significatiōe. Laudato si misignore
p sora luna ⁊ le stelle. in celu lai formate
clarite ⁊ pciose ⁊ belle. Laudato si misignore
p frē vēto ⁊ p aere ⁊ nubilo ⁊ sereno ⁊ onne
tēpo. p loquale ale tue creature dai sustēn
tamento. Laudato si misignore p sor aqua. la
quale emultо utile ⁊ hūile ⁊ pciosa ⁊ casta.
Laudato si misignore p frē focu. p laquale
enn allumini la notte. ⁊ ellu ell ⁊ iocūdo
⁊ robustoso ⁊ forte. Laudato si misignore p
sora mā matre tūa. la quale ne sustenta
⁊ governa. ⁊ pduce ⁊ dūsi fructi cō colorati
floi ⁊ herba. Laudato si misignore p quelli
Re p̄donano p lo tuo amore. ⁊ sostengo in
firmitate ⁊ tribulatione. beati quelli Rei
sostenrano in pace. Ka da te altissimo sirano
incoronati. Laudato si misignore p sora
nostra morte corpale. da laquale nullu
hō uīuēte possappare. guai acquelli Re
morrano ne le peccata mortali. beati quel
li Re trovarano le tue sanctissime voluntati.
Ka la morte secūda nol farra male. Lau
date ⁊ bñdicete misignore ⁊ rēgratiate
⁊ serviate li cū grande humilitate.

THE CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN IN A THIRTEENTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPT IN THE LIBRARY OF ASSISI

By Sister Water, O My Lord, be prais'd !
Useful is she and lowly, precious and chaste.

Be praisèd, O My Lord, by Brother Fire,
By whom Thou lightenest our steps at night,
And fair is he and merry, masterful and of might !

Be praisèd, O My Lord, by our mother, Sister Earth,
Who governeth and sustaineth us and giveth birth
To divers fruits and coloured flowers and to herbs !

O bless and praise My Lord and thankful be,
And serve My Lord with great humility !

Having set these verses to a suitable air, he taught his companions to say and sing them. Next he sent for Brother Pacifico, known in the world as the King of Verses, in order that he might be given a small company of singing friars who should go about as the true Minstrels of the Lord. First of all he who preached best should preach, then all should sing together, and finally the preacher should say, " We are the Lord's minstrels, and for this service we wish to be paid by you, thus, that you abide in penitence." " For what," asked Francis, " are the servants of the Lord but His Minstrels, who should arouse the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy ? "

Through all his trials and his various Rules he returned to his earliest fount of inspiration, his chivalric conception of God's troubadours, who by the power of poetry and the charm of music should convert the world to penitence and to joy.

CHAPTER XVI

The Last Year—The Last Journeys—The Testament of St. Francis.

I

ONE cannot help feeling that the tendency of modern biographers has been to exaggerate the sufferings of Francis's closing years. Physically his martyrdom was beyond exaggeration; he was blind, lame, maimed, racked with fever, and wounded so that he could not move without excruciating pain. But recent writers add to this a spiritual tragedy, a sense of failure, a foreboding as to the future of his Order, a suspicion of being constantly surrounded by an influence hostile to the great ideals that had formed the inspiration of his life.

To say that Francis's work had failed, either during his lifetime or at any subsequent period, is surely to utter a most amazing paradox. For all his humility, he could not but be aware that God had crowned his constant prayers and aspirations in a manner far exceeding his most daring dreams. He carried the seal of Christ in his own flesh; he knew his little wasted body, clad in sackcloth, would one day be wrapped in silk and cloth of gold; he had been assured by God of his own salvation and that his Order should not perish until the Judgment: how is it possible that his faith could admit of doubt but that God would continue to guide it? Such fears as he may have had were met by such assurance as to overflood his trouble with new praise. In a vision it was asked him—"Why dost thou fret thee thus, poor little mortal? Have I set thee as shepherd over My Religion that thou shouldst forget I am its chief Protector? I have appointed thee, simple as thou art, for this very end, that the things that I shall perform through thee may be ascribed, not unto men's working, but unto grace from above. I have called this religion; I will keep it and feed it, and when some fall off I will raise up others in their place, yea, were none born,

I would even cause them to be born. And by whatsoever shocks this little poor Religion may be shaken, it shall alway abide unscathed under My guard ! "

His physical sufferings were alleviated by the adoring care of faithful friends watched over by the " maternal " devotion of that great minister, his Vicar-General Elias ; yet it is precisely here that a discord, a hostility, has been invented, in the face of the most ancient testimony, on the strength of legends whose first appearance dates from some three generations later, a large part of which are ostentatiously partisan, and many incidents manifestly apocryphal. For the rest, we know that he had no desire to rule the Order himself ; had he not exclaimed even as early as 1218, on hearing how his friars of the mission to Germany had been persecuted by the populace and authorities, " These undertakings are far too great for Brother Francis " ? It is to wrong him to suppose that having chosen, with God's guidance, a Vicar and a Protector for his Order, he should now prove so faithless and disloyal to them as to criticize their government and even countenance a silent opposition among his more intimate companions. Every word that we know of his proves that he trusted them ; those legends that suggest the contrary we shall examine in their place.

II

While Francis was still resting at S. Damiano, in the hut of reeds in the convent garden where he had composed the Canticle of the Creatures, an ancient quarrel between the Bishop and the Municipality of Assisi burst into flame. Francis sent Pacifico, the Laureate of the Order, with several other singers to the city, summoned the magistrates to the Bishop's palace and there before the rival authorities caused the Brothers to sing his hymn, to which he had added the following verse for the occasion :

> Be praisèd, O my Lord, by those who pardon in Thy love,
> And injury and tribulation bear !
> Blessed are they who in Thy peace are found,
> For by Thee, O Thou Most High, shall they be crowned !

The Priors and ecclesiastics wept as they listened ; when the hymn concluded they embraced and without discussion

parted friends. Such was the power of St. Francis during his latter years.

At length, setting out by easy stages, the Brothers carried him to the little group of wooded hills in the midst of the Valley of Rieti, and here paused within a few miles of the city, as once more he had become too ill to be moved farther. He lay in the house of the parish priest of S. Fabiano, where afterwards arose the little convent of "La Foresta." There is no prettier place in the whole of Italy, situate in a smiling landscape, encircled by distant mountains, and surrounded by glades of oak and chestnut, in spring and autumn decked with myriads of flowers. Had he sight sufficient left him now, one wonders, to gaze at the majestic peak of Terminillo, or the blue range of the Veline hills from which the sun arises, or over the wide plain to his earliest refuge at Poggio Bustone, or to Greccio whose castle fronts the morning light?

All the people of Rieti came out to greet him, from the Bishop and the magistrates down to the poorest beggar. The weather was hot, and the thirsty crowd soon stripped the vineyard of the poor priest of its grapes. Yet we are told at the word of the saint the yield of the coming vintage was nearly doubled, and still is shown the vat wherein the miracle took place.

His entrance into Rieti, riding on an ass, was a triumphal progress. The church bells filled the valley with their clamour; and he was met by the crowd that strewed branches in the way. He was lodged in the Bishop's palace in the centre of the city and hundreds waited and watched around the building where he lay. The secret of the stigmata was known to many; the people begged for the water in which the sacred wounds were washed to cure their ailing cattle. The cripples and diseased, the blind and maimed were brought to him, to be healed by the Sign of the Cross that he made over them.

But the longing for solitude drove him once more to the hermitage of Fonte Colomba, where three years earlier the Rule had been inspired. Besides the little chapel of the Magdalene, that he had built with his own hands, there were now a few cells that may still be seen, on the edge of the cliff in the solitary forest. Added to the pain of his many infirmities he was suffering intolerable agony in his eyes. The doctor thought well to resort to cautery, and the red-hot iron was prepared.

THE CONVENT OF LA FORESTA, NEAR RIETI

THE LAKE OF PIEDILUCO ON THE WAY TO RIETI

"O Brother Fire," cried the saint, "who art among all creatures most noble and useful, be courteous to me now; for I have ever loved thee for love of thy Creator." The brethren fled, not daring to watch his torture; when it was over Francis rebuked them, and enjoined the operator that if the burning were not sufficient, he should repeat it. Later this was done, but without alleviation; the doctor told the other friars that he would apply such remedies with fear even to the strongest men; yet this man, so weak and fragile, had borne the worst without a sign of grief.

In spite of his sufferings the evangelizing ardour constantly burned within him. "My brethren," he cried, "let us begin to serve God better; for all we have done so far is nothing!" He wished to return to the service of the lepers. He called his pangs and sufferings "Sisters" that ministered to his soul.

Cardinal Ugolino, who with Brother Elias was continually at hand, counselled him to seek the help of certain famous doctors in Siena; and thither he was transported—probably by way of the Valley of the Tiber and the Paglia—attended by a doctor from Pieti. Of their crossing a treeless land close to the towering rock of Campiglia d' Orcia, on the northern slopes of Mount Amiata, a gracious tale is told; how the little party were accosted by three ladies, who cried to the saint, "Welcome, Sir Poverty!" as they passed. Delighted with this greeting, Francis asked his doctor to give them, as they seemed poor, an alms; which he did, whereupon the ladies vanished and nowhere could any trace of them be seen!

Siena received the saint with the utmost reverence, but the skill of her physicians availed nothing. A violent hæmorrhage warned him of his end.

Now arose for the mediæval mind the urgent, all-important question: what fortunate town would be enriched by the great treasure of the miracle-working bones of this acknowledged saint? With followers all over Christendom, blazing forth his glory, speeding the sick and sinful to his tomb, his relics would be a prize indeed worth a great city's striving, at the risk of a siege, or an interdict, or of secular and spiritual war.

Vicar-General Elias, fully aware of the urgency, justly and patriotically determined that the resting-place of this great saint should be his native town. Tenderly he carried

him to the Celle of Cortona, an exquisite hermitage where they rested for a month. No pilgrim who has time should miss the Celle, for it is one of the sweetest and most typical of small Franciscan convents, nestling with its rustic bridge beside a mountain torrent in a wooded glen, resembling and yet differing from the Carceri. It was here that Francis, suffering from dropsy, is said to have dictated his will amid the singing of birds and the murmur of leaves and waters. The little convent was built a few years later by Elias; after various vicissitudes it passed into the hands of the Capuchins.

From Cortona they carried him to Gubbio, where was already a convent—did he say farewell to Brother Wolf, one wonders?—from Gubbio up the long straight fertile valley and through the pretty, winding Chiascio gorge to Gualdo, where was already a little hostel; and thence down the upper valley of the Topino to Nocera, where a strong guard of horsemen met him to escort the little party to Assisi. At Nocera it is said they rested, not at the convent with its thirteenth-century church near the summit of that pyramidal city, but at the semi-ruinous hermitage on the hill-side, to the north of the road to Bagnara, where are the famous springs. Thence they must have passed down under the walls of the city by the stream-side to where is now the railway station and wound up over the hills to the right of the road, where led a mediæval track directly to Assisi, past the fine castle of Postignano and Le Montarelle. One may still see traces of the old paved way, and of the buried ruins of a feudal village called Satriano, which with its neighbouring abbey was destroyed in the wars of the fourteenth century. Here apparently the military commissariat broke down and the soldiers were unable to buy food.

"It is right that you get nothing," Francis told them, "seeing that you put your trust in your flies, that is, your money, instead of in God!" He bade them go back and beg for food in the name of Christ; thus adjured, the people gave what they had and their needs were satisfied. Thence the little party with its cavalcade made its way down past S. Giovanni dei Tre Fossi through the oak-wood to the old ruined mediæval bridge over the torrent not far from Pian della Pieve; then up the opposite slope to Costa di Trex and so forward to Assisi, along the shoulder of Subasio, there being then no road near the bottom of the gorge. It is quite

THE HERMITAGE OF THE CELLE, NEAR CORTONA

easy for a good walker to follow them and explore the whole way; the scenery is extremely beautiful, true background for a mediæval tale.

Assisi received them with ecstasy of joyful adulation. Their saint had come back to them to die, to bequeath them the great treasure. Henceforth their city took high rank among the holy places of the earth. No Emperor by choosing it for his seat and capital could confer a glory so enduring as their Poverello by dying in their midst. From a small and obscure provincial town, such as Spello or Nocera, it became at once in pious eyes as a sister of Rome and Nazareth, to be entered barefoot by pilgrim kings, to be named in liturgies, to be hymned by poets. Seldom indeed has Sister Death endowed a little people with so rich a gift!

III

Francis lay in the Episcopal Palace, guarded like a great prince by his brethren, the Assisan crowd and the Municipal Police. Night and day his clear, sweet voice could be heard singing, so that the people marvelled, since it is not the custom of men so to die. He sent for the Brothers to bless them before he died, and as the Vicar-General Elias chanced to be on his left, he crossed his arms in order that his right hand should rest upon his head.

"Thee, O my son," he said, "I bless in all and for all, since under thy direction the Highest has multiplied my brethren and sons, so that in thee I bless them all; may God the King of all things bless thee in Heaven and Earth. I bless thee as I can and more than I can, and for that which I cannot, may He who can do all things do for thee; may God remember thy great work and labour, and may thy lot be reserved for thee in the retribution of the just. Mayst thou find whatever blessing thou desirest, and may every just request of thine be granted!" Then, turning to the rest, he added, "Farewell, all my sons, live in the fear of God and abide in Him, since there will come on you a terrible temptation, and the tribulation already draweth nigh. Happy are those that shall persevere in the great works begun; since many shall separate themselves for the future scandals. As for myself, I hasten to the Lord in the confidence to reach my God, Whom with devotion I have served in spirit."

These words appear to have the true Franciscan ring, the

personal note of Francis. What was the terrible temptation that he saw approaching? What was the secret bane already in the Order? It was long before that later "scandal" of the building of the great convent, which is supposed by some to have separated many friars. One would suppose that it were some vice of heresy or disobedience, contrasted here with the faithful labour of Elias. The answer is to be found surely in the Will, which, whether it was dictated at the Celle of Cortona or a few weeks later at Assisi, is a sure indication of the thoughts that were uppermost in Francis's mind before his death. An analysis of this important document shows clearly that it is chiefly directed against heresy, irreverence and disobedience; its object was to strengthen the hands of the ministers of the Order. The first paragraph is autobiographical and relates how the saint was brought into religion by penance and self-discipline, especially in the service of lepers. The second paragraph expresses his faith in churches; the third is a passionate appeal for reverence for the priests of the Holy Roman faith, in whom he is unwilling to consider sin, because he sees in them the Son of God. The fourth appeals for reverence for the Sacraments; the fifth for the Name of God; the sixth for the doctors of the Church and theologians; the seventh for the Rule, as formed upon the Gospels and confirmed to him by the Pope. The eighth is a long paragraph summing up the Rule from the point of view of the great Franciscan Virtues—Poverty, Humility and Obedience. In it he first insists on Labour: "I worked with my hands and so desire to work, and I firmly desire that all the other brethren work in some honest employment. Let those who know not one learn, not through desire for a wage, but for example's sake and to drive out sloth." Next, that the churches and dwelling-places of the brethren should be such as become the Holy Poverty which they have vowed; then, that the Brothers should not seek letters of recommendation from the Roman Court, but should obey their minister and not try to wander or act beyond obedience and his will. The sequel is still more ominous:

"All the Brothers are bound to obey their Guardians and to perform the Office according to the Rule. And should any be found who do not perform the Office according to the Rule and who wish to change it, or who are not Catholics, let all the Brothers, wheresoever they are, be bound by obedience, wheresoever one of those be found to

present him to the nearest Custos of the place where he is found. And the Custos is strictly bound by obedience to guard him strongly as a prisoner both by day and by night, so that he cannot be taken out of his hands, until he shall personally place him in the hands of his Minister. And the Minister is strictly bound by obedience to send him by such Brothers as shall guard him day and night as a prisoner until they present him before the Lord of Ostia, who is the Lord, Protector and Corrector of the whole Fraternity."

The last paragraph denounces any changing or glossing of the Rule, especially any appealing to an older reading or interpretation. " The Brethren shall not say : This is another Rule ; for this is but a remembrance, admonition and my testament, which I make for you to the end that we may observe the Rule that we have promised in a more Catholic way."

In this stern admonition, it is impossible not to see the influence of Elias, who doubtless since he joined the blind saint at Siena had been revealing to him the difficulties that beset the administration of the Order. And yet there are still historians, who in face of all evidence believe that these two great men were not at one as to the absolute and urgent need for discipline among the vast and rapidly increasing multitude who were girding themselves with the Cord of Obedience in order to wander without let or stay even beyond the bounds of Holy Church. The inferences we must draw from the stern words are almost startling ; that it should be necessary for the Founder to appeal to the brethren on behalf of the Church, her priesthood, her theologians, her sacraments, to make provision against those who should seek to change the office, or should even not be Catholics at all. Of the lesser danger, of the fall from Apostolic Poverty, we shall hear much later ; but still more of the rejection of the yoke of Obedience, through that most insidious sin of spiritual pride.

CHAPTER XVII

The Death of St. Francis—His Mission.

I

"WELCOME, Sister Death!" sang Francis, and he added a final verse to his Canticle of the Creatures:

"Be praised, my Lord, by Sister Death, our death of the body,
From whom no man living can flee;
Woe is for them who die in mortal sin.
But blessed are those found in Thy most holy Will,
For to them the second death can work no ill!"

When the end was nigh they carried him to the Portiuncula, leaving the city by the old gate, the Porta Sementone, which is to-day buried in the convent of St. Apollinare. As the procession of the friars with the litter, followed by the municipal guards and a crowd of citizens, passed the old lazaret which stood near the spot where the Casa Gualdi stands to-day, the saint bade the bearers set him down and turn his face towards Assisi. He could not see it with his bodily eyes, but he prayed that the place might ever be the dwelling of those who serve God truly and glorify His Name.

Thus Francis came back to the Portiuncula, where eighteen years before his new life of apostolacy had begun. They laid him in that little room, called the Infirmary, one of the few fragments that still remain of the great cluster of many cells, dormitories and oratories, with kitchens, refectories and the great stone Guest-House, built by the Municipality of Assisi, that formed the beloved home of Francis's day. Though poor and humble and irregular, the buildings were at this time quite extensive and able to shelter many scores, if not hundreds of friars. All, as we know, were not allowed to enter the holy chapel, but to have several chapels was a characteristic

of all early Franciscan dwellings. The whole convent was enclosed by walls and gates, with a porter keeping guard.

So it was that when that great Roman lady, Giacoma di Settisoli, an intimate and faithful friend to Francis and his Order, came with a great retinue to visit him, she was refused admittance. But Francis bade the gates be opened, "for the rule concerning women is not for Brother Giacoma." He had been on the point of sending for her and begging for some gifts—a habit of grey cloth wherein to be buried, a napkin for his face, a cushion for his head, wax-candles for his bier, and a sweet cake that she had often made for him when he visited her house in Rome. These things by intuition she had brought with her.

And now the feast of St. Michael was passed and once more he called the Brothers round him and blessed them. We can see nothing contradictory in the fact that there are two stories of such a benediction; they relate to different episodes; the life of Francis is full of such repetitions. In the intimacy of his surroundings his mind went back to the earliest days of his Order and the special blessing was this time conferred upon his "first-born," Bernard.

Then, symbolist unto the last, in imitation of Christ, he caused bread to be brought and broken for him, and the pieces he distributed to the Brothers one by one with a last commandment that they should love one another. Then his "Praises of the Creatures" was sung to him and the Gospel of the Passion from St. John was read, and finally at his command he was laid naked on the barren earth, ashes were sprinkled on him and so he died. One of the Brothers saw in vision an orb of light ascending, while over the convent roof in the sunset skies gathered with joyous song a great multitude of larks.

II

Such, in brief telling, is the life-story of St. Francis, told with the special aim of showing how were planted the various local shoots, the varying traditions, that springing up and spreading formed "Franciscan Italy." Outside this province in the turmoil of great cities it was inevitable that a hardier species should prevail; a larger, a more practical, or, if you will, more worldly, interpretation. Within its boundaries, in the seclusion of the little mountain hermitages, survived

the more delicate spiritual flowers, sprung from a deeper intimacy. But it is ever hardest for those nearest to a " prophet " to realize his importance for the world.

The process of his conversion, the renunciation of his inheritance, his espousal of Poverty, his Spiritual Chivalry, his rebuilding of churches, his preaching by parables, his tending of lepers, his reclaiming of outcasts, his conversion of robbers, his redemption of Nature, his mystical Crucifixion on the precipices of La Verna, down to the moment when he lay naked on the sacred soil of the Portiuncula—were the acts of a great symbolic drama embodying the essential principles of the life of Christ. His gestures are so large, so striking and significant, as to be fitted for a universal stage. His power could not be confined to Umbrian villages or to the souls of the simple mystics who dwelt in his little hermitages on the Umbrian hills. Already the greater audiences were waiting for his message at Padua, Paris, Oxford—wherever new worlds were made.

We have the whole matter in embryo in " the Dilemma of St. Francis," and the conclusion in the answer of Sylvester and St. Clare. Was it God's will that he should give himself to prayer and contemplation and the mystic joys of what he called " the Life of Angels," or should he go forth to preach and minister to men? We know the reply; the reaction of his surroundings bears constant witness to its truth. Wherever he touched Nature, she seems to have responded with a willingness, a " courtesy " equal to his own; but wherever he touched man, he communicated a message, a life-seed, a new creative grace unto the world. For his inspiration came not from Nature, but from Christ his Master; his mission was not to Nature, but to mankind.

He adjusted Christianity to the age that was to come, deepened the channel when the Life-Stream was impeded by material accumulations during centuries of chaos. Before St. Francis, religion was mediæval, which is almost to say, barbarian or oriental; an intricate and gorgeous web of mysteries and marvels, of hierarchies, rituals, priestly subtleties, anchoretic macerations, and fanatical propitiations of an Emperor-God. Francis did not denounce these things, as did the heretics, but he set in the midst of them the human Figure of the Saviour, Who was a Poor Man, homeless, weary, suffering, such as the simplest heart could understand. Rightly

has he been called "The Fifth Evangelist"; his Gospel is that of sentiment and sympathy.

What did the world do with it? That is our next question. What memorials of his life, what expressions of his spirit, have the generations that succeeded him transmitted unto us, and, moreover, how did these expressions severally arise? It is obviously far too large a question to attempt to answer in a single volume. All we can do is to try to indicate in outline the origin and first development of the chief monuments of this Gospel, with brief accounts of the surroundings and the acts of its apostles.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

The Body of St. Francis—Pope Gregory IX—The Canonization—The Burial Place—The Title-deed—The Church of S. Francesco.

I

THE body of St. Francis immediately became one of the most sacred treasures of the Catholic world. No sooner had life passed from it than the first preoccupation of the friars and the citizens of Assisi was to get it safely and worthily entombed, where neither the Perugians nor the pious bandits of any other jealous city could steal it, or mutilate it and distribute it limb by limb as had happened to the bodies of many other saints, or so to threaten it as to afford excuse to the Papal Curia for laying it for safety among the relics of the Apostles.

At the Portiuncula all through the night after the saint's passing it was watched by an immense crowd of worshippers, Brothers drawn thither from all parts of Umbria, and the great retinue of Giacoma di Settisoli; citizens, knights and soldiers of Assisi; peasants and pilgrims from all the country round. The transfiguration of the flesh by holy Death was noted by many; while thousands gazed with awe upon the sacred stigmata. Thomas of Celano says that for the sweetness and joy of the hymns and the radiance of the tapers the vigil by the dead Saint seemed a watch of angels.

In the bright October dawn new crowds flocked down from the city, bearing branches of olive, flowers, and wax tapers, and singing joyfully, because the great treasure was henceforth to be theirs. On the following day with blare of civic trumpets, and the hymns and chants of the people, the Brothers carried it in procession to the city, passing by the road of S. Damiano and pausing there in order that the sacred wounds might be seen and kissed by Clare and her Poor Ladies at the little grating, to which the body was lifted in their arms. Finally they laid it in the small Church of S. Giorgio, hard by the eastern gate, where Francis many years before had learned

his letters, and where he had preached the first sermons of his apostolacy.

There followed innumerable miracles, which all may read in the special treatise annexed by Thomas of Celano to his Lives of the Saint. He gives us ten cases of deformity and contortion, six of blindness, five of deafness and loss of speech, two of leprosy, two of demoniacal possession, and fifteen others of various diseases, such as dropsy, gout, tumours and other not uncommon maladies, marvellously cured at the tomb in S. Giorgio ; he gives them all with details terrible to read, just as they were reported to and examined by the Papal Commission, held at Perugia for the canonization. It is a great mistake to suppose that the thirteenth century, inspired by reverence, was less careful with regard to evidence of miracle than we, inspired by scepticism, boast that we are to-day.

Meanwhile in March 1227 the aged Pope Honorius, reputed to have lived nearly a century, was gathered to his fathers, and Cardinal Ugolino, Francis's friend and Protector of his Order, reigned in his stead as Gregory IX. The new Pope, despite or because of his four-score years, was a man of vigour and determination, as is proved by his long struggle against the Emperor Frederick II. Implacable enemy and ardent friend, he probably regarded his great love for Francis as the fairest treasure of his life.

He had known him intimately under a hundred circumstances ; had collaborated with him in drawing up the Rule ; counselled him in his dealings with the world and the Papal Court ; had watched with him, prayed with him, felt at one with him. Almost his first measure was to cause a biography of his friend to be written by Thomas of Celano, who accomplished his task most admirably, for we may be sure that neither the Pope nor the friars would be easily satisfied. Then, when within a few weeks of his coronation the turbulence of his Roman subjects drove him from his capital, Gregory's first move was to Assisi, where he passed the months of June and July 1227 staying at the episcopal palace, and from time to time visiting St. Clare, whose counsel he, like many another prelate, valued greatly. Doubtless, they spoke much of Francis and the Pope's plans for his entombment ; it is likely that Elias, the close friend of both, was frequently present at these conferences. It was surely now that Gregory deter-

THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS, ASSISI

mined to build in Assisi a great papal palace, in which he could live on future visits, and to entrust its keeping to the friars, who should also guard the sepulchre.

A year later, in July 1228, the Pope returned to Assisi for the canonization, a glorious ceremony of mediæval pomp which Thomas of Celano describes with the enthusiasm of an eye-witness and truly Franciscan appreciation of the magnificent robes and jewels of the prelates, and the multitude and rank of the secular nobility. The scene was an open space not far from the little Chapel of S. Giorgio, with seats on scaffoldings specially prepared and covered with bright-coloured cloth in the custom of the period—none of the churches of the town being large enough to contain the enormous crowd.

Gregory, like his kinsman Innocent III, was famous for his eloquence and delivered a magnificent eulogy on the holy life of his protégé and friend. That his voice was broken by sobs we can easily believe. An account of the proven miracles was then read before the people, many of whom had doubtless supplied testimony, and after their due examination by an ecclesiastical lawyer, Cardinal Ranieri, the Pope declared in the name of the Church that as God had manifestly glorified Father Francis in Heaven by according him such graces for those who asked for them through him, it was fitting that he should be also venerated upon the earth, his name inscribed in the roll of saints and his feast be kept on the anniversary of his death. The ceremony concluded with a great Te Deum, after which the Pontiff and the prelates passed into the little sanctuary of S. Giorgio, made offerings and kissed the shrine that held the sacred body of the Poverello.

It remained to use to the utmost the glory of the new saint for the quickening of the faith and the spiritual life of the Church among all nations; and for an outward and visible sign to enshrine his Relics safely in a sanctuary that should be at once a centre for his Order and a worthy monument. Gregory determined that the monument should be his, that the friars should dwell there only as bodyguard of the Relics, with no such rights as the tenure of their other convents gave them. A special document had been prepared, relating to a rocky spur known as the "Collis Infernus" (Lower Hill), or "Collis Inferni" ("Hill of Hell"), the gift of which his papal agent, Vicar-General Elias, obtained from a pious citizen, Simon Puzzarelli. On this land was to be erected a great

shrine for the body, with a papal palace for Gregory and his successors, and lastly a convent for the government of the Order with dormitories and refectories sufficient to accommodate not only many friars in residence, but also the numerous guests who might come for the Chapters. On the day following the canonization Pope Gregory laid the foundation-stone of his new house and Francis's, from which time forward the building grew apace.

The most important and interesting title-deed may be seen in the Communal Library. It clearly shows that the building is a papal palace, in which many Popes have at different times resided, attracted by the charm of its relative seclusion, as well as the salubrity, sanctity and beauty of the surroundings. From the reign of Gregory's successor, Innocent IV, down to the time of Benedict XII, the place was also used as the Treasury of the Roman Church, doubtless on account of its superior security to that of any other papal palace. Moreover, even after six and a half centuries, the strength of this argument was admitted by authorities no less august than the legal advisers to the Italian State. For when all religious property throughout Italy was confiscated, it was allowed that the "Sacro Convento" was the private property of the Pope. Neither *de facto* nor *de jure* had it ever belonged to the Order, though as guests the friars had lived there for six and a half centuries. For the last forty years it has been occupied in part by a government school; but soon that occupation, always temporary, will terminate.

II

The Basilica of St. Francis at Assisi is generally held to be one of the most perfect buildings in the world. Perhaps the secret of its charm is harmony. Whether you come to it as a hurried tourist, intent on gathering a bunch of memories quickly, or as a serious student, critic or enthusiast, eager to trace traditions and transitions, schools and masters, in this great treasury of the history of Art; or as a pilgrim, seeking in this holy place the grace that breathes from every relic of the Poverello—the impression of it you will bear away will be single and unique.

Compare it for a moment with your memories of other famous buildings, as, for example, the Cathedrals of Orvieto or Siena. In these you have a glorious façade, multicoloured,

with a delicate charm of the old carven marbles, and a glaring mediocrity of restored mosiacs, a rich or an austere interior and a chapel or a library, in each case adorned with some of the most marvellous frescoes in the world. But the memories are made up of most different impressions, only strung together by the accident of place. Apart from quite irrelevant historical coincidence, is there a spiritual reason why Signorelli should not have equally well recorded his imaginative strength in the library at Siena, or Pinturicchio his bewitching and romantic dreams in the chapel of Orvieto? But in these churches of Assisi, each detail is in its place, a part of a single whole; not only because all alike are the product of one period—of about a hundred years, that is to say—but because they are the flowers of a single inspiration.

The wealth of beauty and interest is absolutely inexhaustible. The architecture of the two churches invites hours of study, for it raises many interesting problems. The frescoes may be divided into schools and periods, and classified under some mighty name: Giunta Pisano, Cimabue, Cavallini, Giotto, Simone Martini, the Lorenzetti; which is surely the best method, but demands both time and patience. However often walls, arches and vaults are studied, there will ever remain unnumbered saints of great loveliness unidentified; and an unnoted wealth of delicate design in the ornamental borders. Then there is the sculpture, the tombs of princes, bishops, saints and warriors, the exquisite carving of many of the capitals, the lace-like fretwork of the rose-traceries, the mosaics encrusted in the walls and altars, and last, but by no means least, the jewelled windows, an endless mine of symbolism and legend. To catalogue or describe all this great treasure is not our purpose; all we can do is to tell how it gradually accumulated, as each generation brought its perfect tribute to the sepulchre of the saint, giving him back the livelier spirit of his own inspiring, incarnated in the material of their art. It is idle to repeat that he did not intend it, that he intended poverty, simplicity, renunciation. His gift was simply life, a gift divine, and therefore unconditioned, limitless; that, given, may never be revoked, or restricted as to what it may bring forth.

Without, the architecture of the two churches is so blended that it is difficult to disentangle them. The classic view from the library of the Hotel Subasio enchants one by the austere

distinction of its central features, exalted by consensus of converging lines. The sixteenth-century cloister framing the Lower Piazza, with its fretwork of innumerable little arches, the roofs and arcaded façade of the great convent seen beyond it; the successive planes of the long walls of the roads at different levels running from the city to the Basilica, lead up to and enhance the central building, setting it in a sense apart. The perpendicular ribs of the splendid Belfry, the bold semi-cylindrical buttresses or *torrioni*, and the graceful arches of the Lower Porch are balanced by the high gable and horizontal lines of the façade of the Upper Church with its rich rose-window, as seen above the double stairway, and the curious, graceful little seventeenth-century cupola crowning the corner. The charm of this strangely perfect composition is exquisitely enhanced by the delicate harmony of colour, the cream-white stone that has mellowed into saffron, the rose-pink stone that has ripened into heliotrope, the slate-blue of the windows, combining and contrasting, the whole defined against the azure sky. Another view beloved by artists, and especially at night, is that which you see as you emerge from the Via Superba, the great church posed, as it were, on the edge of the cliff with the tall campanile looming up over the little cupola, its majesty increased by the high wall and the stairways. Glorious, too, are the views of the lofty pile of buildings seen over the vast bluff of the convent from the valley of the Tescio or from the farther hills; lovelier still that first aerial glimpse that greets one as one surmounts the crest of the last range coming from Gubbio. From every point of view, at all times and seasons, the group is beautiful; ethereal-ized by the full moonlight, it is loveliest of all.

Within, the two churches are like two chords of music, that, perfectly contrasted, yet complete each other. Each with the other's loss would be poorer in itself. One church is all humility, penitence or prayer; the other absolution, gladness and thanksgiving. Day after day as you visit them, their diverse spell will grow on you. The one subdues, the other gladdens; the one sustains, the other crowns. The more you know them the more difficult it becomes to say which of the two you think more beautiful. The best time to see the Lower Church is by the evening light, which streams down the nave from the windows in the apse. All day long the Upper is full of splendour. You will probably spend

more time in the Lower Church, because with its chapels it is the richer; but hard to match is the thrill of glad surprise as you emerge into the spacious Upper transepts, when the upward lines, the light and colour so exalt you that for a while you seem to tread on air.

As with the saint, so with his church, we must try to trace its history, in order to define the elements making up its harmony. Here, too, we shall have to choose between authorities at conflict, and our principle of choice will ever be the same. Truth is usually found to be the simplest explanation; it is prejudice that makes complexity, where all that is worth knowing is simple, fair and plain. Willingly we leave to the expert the strife of disputations; for us remains our faith in Beauty, which no new criticism of old tests can possibly destroy.

CHAPTER II

Brother Elias of the Hamlet of Beviglie.

I

NEXT to St. Francis, no man in Franciscan story has been more discussed than Elias Bombarone; and no man is more important. It is to him particularly that we are indebted for our St. Francis of to-day. To his inexhaustible energy and organizing genius, seconded by the strong co-operation of Cardinal Ugolino, Gregory IX, we probably owe the very survival of the Order, which otherwise might have been lost in limitless confusion. For you cannot bind a mass of men by a memory only, any more than you can make a garden by merely scattering seeds. Francis's ideal may have been a Gospel freedom, disciples wandering and singing their way about the world and converting it by their perfect loyalty. But who was to protect society from the disloyal, the impostors, the sturdy tramps who dressed their sloth in the glory of Francis's fame? The Life implied a Rule, the Rule a Discipline, the Discipline an Authority to punish. Where was the man to give these things? The very essence of Franciscanism was such as to discourage the growth of masterful organizing energies; so much so as almost to enforce the paradox that the man to make the Franciscan Order could hardly be a Franciscan in himself. At any rate, after the death of Peter of Cataneo one looks in vain for such a man among the first companions. He was not to be found in Bernard the humble, Giles the ecstatic; Leo the gentle Pecorello; not in Pacifico the Poet, Rufino the mystic, the burly Masseo, or Angelo the very courteous knight. The next generation of the sons of Francis bore many of the greatest intellects of the age; but these were the nurslings of another, the stepfather or foster-father of the Order. Meanwhile in every quarter the seeds were springing up—new pious groups in sceptical cities, new zealous sects on mountain-sides;

BROTHER ELIAS OF BEVIGLIE

(from an old engraving of his contemporary portrait at the foot of the Crucifix, by Guinta Pisano)

captives released from old responsibilities, hermits of the forests, wanderers on the roads! Left to themselves without government they would have been a growing danger, in view of their resemblance to the many weeds of heresy, already rampant in the Church. The man who should restrain them could count on making enemies; strife, rancour and abuse would be his lot in power and, when he fell, inevitable obloquy. A saint, who was also an organizing genius, might have accomplished it by a miracle; the gardener of Francis's vineyard was Elias Bombarone—an organizing genius, if you like, but not a saint.

II

Elias was born about the same year as St. Francis—later historians, wishing to emphasize and give a supernatural colour to the contrast, have added on the same day. His birthplace was probably Beviglie, a small feudal hamlet about three miles to the north-west of Assisi. As this little place and its somewhat larger neighbour, Tordibetto, are excellent examples of the feudal villages that were such an important feature in the life of the friars during the first years of the Order, we suggest that those who have time to study this "Franciscan Italy" should make a visit to these villages the object of a walk. Or they can drive to Tordibetto, and in an hour with a little climbing see all there is to be seen.

Tordibetto is to-day an oblong block of buildings with four round mediæval towers at the corners, standing on a slight rise amid fields and gardens, with only its modern church and a couple of farms outside the ancient walls. Doubtless in feudal days its whole life, human and animal, huddled by night inside the castle. To-day it holds about a dozen families.

From it a steep little path, once paved, leads up to Beviglie on the summit of the hill. This village also had its four towers, but only two remain, with three sides of the old outer wall. You enter the tiny court or street on the western side under an arch; the hovels are tiny, like all things mediæval, and are approached by narrow outside stairways, like the oldest houses in Assisi. At the corner of the court there is a little church, the sacristy of which was the ancient oratory. It still has its altar and a few fading frescoes, St. Francis and St. Anthony, flanking the Madonna. The village holds six families: forty to fifty souls. In one of these little houses

was born Elias Bombarone, the confidant of Popes and Emperors, the haughty prelate, the great builder!

While Francis was dreaming of chivalry, or revelling with wild companions, this youth was making mattresses for livelihood, and devoting his spare time to study. To such purpose did he work that, while still a lad, he was teaching their letters to the schoolboys of Assisi, at which point he may have known Francis Bernardone. It has even been suggested, by no less an authority than Prof. Paul Sabatier, that Elias may have been that discreet, grave friend, who, according to the first Life of Thomas of Celano, accompanied Francis on those distant wanderings on the mountains, incidental to the long process of conversion. For Thomas of Celano probably wrote this Life while in close touch with Elias, who may have supplied some details of the boyhood, which do not appear in any subsequent biography. In particular, there is that strange story of the secret treasure, for which Francis professed to be seeking when he was really seeking God. Now there is a cave, but a few steps from the village of Beviglie, an old Etruscan tomb with a legend about treasure; so possibly this excuse was used to cover his long absence and here Elias without kept watch, while Francis prayed within. However this may be, when came the crisis, Elias was probably studying at Bologna and only met his friend again in 1211. Then was it that Francis's charm drew him completely from the natural orbit of his secular ambitions and led him to change his habit without a true change of heart.

Elias was certainly the strong man of the Order, into whose hand the power fell, because he alone was capable of wielding it. We have seen him a Provincial Minister for Syria, guiding that most difficult of missions and converting another able man, the young Cæsar of Spires. We have witnessed how he realized the need of a Protector at the Curia and used his influence with Francis always in favour of the larger policy. Through the critical years that followed Francis's return from the East it was Elias who continually directed, extended, organized, and governed distant provinces, with wisdom and unremitting energy. There can be no question of Francis's love and gratitude, or of the value that he set on Elias's advice. He would never have so trusted him, had not Elias been sincere, gifted as Francis was with inerrant insight into the hearts of men. It was to Elias, we must not forget, that

at Foligno in 1224 the premonitory dream was sent, wherein an old priest stood before him, bidding him tell "his Francis" that before two years were over the Lord would call him to Himself—even as it occurred. This, and that Francis chose him as Minister and, with a special blessing that recorded his great zeal and labour and how that the Highest had multiplied his sons and brethren through him, bequeathed to him the direction of the Order, must be sufficient warrant for him with us, despite the bitterness of the tongues of men in the day of his apostacy.

For it often happens that the most masterful are least at unity in themselves. There seem to have been two men in Elias: the better was the friend, almost "the mother," as Celano says, of Francis. But Francis's death broke the bright spell which his love had cast for years over the worldly passions of Bombarone, the last gleams of which seem to shine out through the rhetoric of that wonderful letter, so full of grief, of devotion and tender pride, that he addressed to the provincial Ministers on the night when that radiant shadow was no more. Well might he say in it:

> "The loss is common to us all, but to me a particular danger, to me, whom he has left in the very midst of the darkness, surrounded by many cares and oppressed by innumerable scourges. . . . For the true light was the presence of our brother and our father Francis . . . who directed our steps into the way of peace."

The letter was signed "Elias, Sinner."

One feels that at this point he felt the natural man emerge in him, the unregenerate Bombarone, incapable of remaining still under the "scourges" of his enemies, and of accounting such trials as "favours," as Francis had bade him do, incapable of walking forward in the darkness, except by the leading of his own ambitions. For the one man who had ventured to correct him "concerning the condition of his soul," had "set out as into a far country," he "who had taught the law of life and delivered to him the testament of peace." In this same letter Elias describes the wondrous miracle of the stigmata which at the saint's express desire had hitherto been kept secret, and physical change of the body that had taken place since death. There is almost a note of passion here. One might say that at that moment Bombarone awoke with two great driving forces in his soul: on the one hand he found

himself the head of a great and growing movement, the master of limitless opportunity, beyond the wildest dreams of his ambition; on the other he felt the exaltation of the glory of his friend to be an aim so holy as to justify the negation of his most sacred principles. It was not only worldly pride that henceforth inspired his actions; it was also a vainglorious love for the Master he had followed. Henceforth for him it was Francis with his heavenly grace, not Poverty or the Rule that mattered; let others follow these, "to the letter," if they could! He would exalt the Seraphic glory and set it forever for all the world by the side of the glory of Christ!

CHAPTER III

The Building of the Church and the later Legends concerning it—The Architecture—The Burial of St. Francis.

I

IN May 1227 a Chapter was held at the Portiuncula to elect a Minister-General for the Order. Elias, the Vicar-General, was passed over and a Florentine lawyer, John Parenti, whom Francis had converted in 1211, was chosen, a safe, large-minded man, a true son of Obedience and of Poverty, unlikely to be the tool of the extremists. He made no particular enemies and left little individual mark on the development of the Order during the five years that he ruled it. Elias remained the real power and knew he could take over the reins again whenever his more urgent duties gave him leisure. Probably he was not unwilling to be temporarily relieved of the routine work of directing so many provinces and convents; for meanwhile he was free to carry out his plans as the Pope's trusted agent. In view of Gregory's anxiety about the building, it is possible that this was also his desire. According to the earlier scheme of organization, when Francis went to the East, he left two Vicars, one of whom was to visit all the provinces, and one to remain at Assisi. Elias himself as Vicar-General had travelled constantly, as now John Parenti did; while, as to the former's eventual successors, Albert of Pisa, Aymon, Crescentius and John of Parma—to go no further—they seem to have spent their term of office in continual visitations. Could the Basilica have been built by such a Minister?

Elias's first care was to secure the sacred body in such a way that it might never more be disturbed. The arrangements for the last journey to Assisi were surely made by him and afterwards for the transporting of the body to S. Giorgio. But for his care it would have passed within the impregnable ramparts of Perugia. Now the great question was to make

a new church ready, a building at once strong enough to defy all future despoilers, and large and fair enough to be the shrine of so great a saint. To collect the money for this enterprise it was necessary to take the tide of Francis's glory at its flood, when the whole of Christendom was ringing with it, when the miracles were multiplying hour by hour at his tomb, when the friars in every land were beset for news and every day was bringing its fresh converts. The first measure had been to hurry on the canonization; and in this, as in all else, Elias, as we have seen, was strongly supported by the Pope.

But even six months before the sanctity of the Poverello had been declared and promulgated, Elias had obtained from Simon Puzzarelli the gift of that rocky spur with precipitous sides—nearly half a mile to the west of the old city and divided from it by a deep ravine,—known as the "Collis Infernus," that is, the "Lower Hill," to distinguish it from the Upper Hill, crowned formerly and afterwards, but not at this time, by the Greater Castle. Possibly malefactors were executed there; and its originally colourless name may thus have acquired an evil significance, or this might have been due to some ancient Pagan cult. With the eye of an engineer of genius Elias saw its unique, but perhaps not obvious, possibilities. A daring prolongation of the rocky spur by means of gigantic piers and arches would provide a spacious level platform, inaccessible from three sides. In case of attack by another city, Assisi could be counted upon to cover the fourth side, a narrow neck of land cleft by a deep ravine—to-day filled up or in part bridged over by the Upper and Lower Piazzas of S. Francesco. Near to the city and of relatively easy access to the pilgrim, it was yet profoundly defiant to the enemy; with all the advantages of a mountain crag—air, sunlight, dignity and seclusion—and none of its attendant inconveniences. To appreciate the labour needed to construct the platform it is necessary to penetrate from the convent grounds into the enormous hollow spaces underneath the arches, when one realizes that what Elias made was an artificial hill of masonry.

A legend was diligently put about that Francis before his death had said that he wished to be buried on this "Hill of Hell," whereon formerly criminals had been executed; the land was made over to the Pope, the canonization splendidly accomplished, the first stone laid of the Basilica, and the work

of building pushed forward with such incredible rapidity, that within twenty-two months the Lower Church in its original form was practically complete.

But the infinite labour of piling up those giant arches that still dominate the valley, demanded inexhaustible treasure. Elias wrestled tirelessly with an enormous correspondence and sent missionaries and messengers to all parts of the world. He put almost intolerable burdens on the Provincial Ministers, naming the sums that he expected each to raise. It was for this campaign that with Pope Gregory's approval he chose Thomas of Celano to write the Life of the saint, though still uncanonized, for the information of the brethren in distant parts. In order to collect from the pilgrims to the tomb, he set up a bowl or vase for alms. It is said—in a book of the following century—that Leo reported the matter to Giles, who was living in evangelical poverty in his Perugian hermitage, where now is the palatial convent of Monte Ripido ; and that Giles bade him, if he were dead to the world, to go and break the offending bowl in pieces, but if he were not dead, to refrain, for else he would not be able to endure the persecution of Elias. So Leo broke the bowl, and Elias had him scourged and banished, whereupon, it has even been suggested, Leo wrote the " Mirror of Perfection " which materially assisted in driving Elias from the generalship !

The latter part of this story is now utterly discredited, for the " Mirror of Perfection " was not written until a very long while afterwards. As for the breaking of the bowl and the consequent scourging and banishment of Leo, the tale is ugly and we are inclined to disbelieve it also. The book that tells it is the " Speculum Vitæ Beati Francisci et Sociorum Ejus," composed at the earliest about 1350 and thus belonging to a period of unquestionable struggle, when it was fashionable to throw obloquy upon Elias, as the first representative of the official hierarchy. The incident is said to have occurred hard by the new buildings, whose magnitude enraged the gentle Leo, but the land was not acquired till March 1228 and Elias lost the Vicar-Generalship in May 1227. Could Elias have caused Leo to be scourged and banished if he had no authority over him ? Again, Leo must have indeed changed his mind, if, with Angelo and Rufino, he wrote the last chapter of the book known to us as the " Legend of the Three Companions," in which the author speaks with much pride of the

great church. If the authenticity of that writing be called in question, why not the authority of the much later and more controversial "Speculum Vitæ"? Moreover, Leo must have known that the collection of the money had the full sanction of Pope Gregory, who was prompting gifts to it by means of a special Indulgence, and in fact, that the building, the bowl, and the money were all the Pope's and not the Order's!

On this story a legend has been manufactured whereby divisions of later date have been traced back to this time, whereas we have no serious reason to assume that the first Companions did not entirely approve of the plans of Pope Gregory. Most of them, such as Bernard, Leo, Angelo, Rufino and Illuminato were buried in the great church beside their Master; many, Leo in particular, died in the great convent. Is it conceivable that these men should have scattered to their mountain hermitages, sullen and passive, giving no testimony for the "Cause," taking no part in the canonization, the laying of the foundation-stone by the Pope, the building of the tomb—the Papal monument to their Beloved—the transporting of his relics to the holy place where they would be safe for ever?

Between the lamb-like Leo and the leonine Elias there may well have been personal differences; but if any Brother at this crisis disapproved of the Pope's plan, what alternative had he to offer? We know from Thomas Celano's Life of St. Clare that she was proud of the great church; so was Thomas of Celano; so was the author of the last chapter of the "Legend of the Three Companions." If a protest were really made, if an unguarded bowl, set up for alms, were really broken, how is it that the action made so small a noise that neither of our chief chroniclers of scandal against Elias, Eccleston or Salimbene, ever got wind of it? The episode is not even in the romance of the "Fioretti," wherein Elias plays the villain's part; but a hundred years after the event, in the "Speculum Vitæ" it came in pat as a pendant to the stories of the "Speculum Perfectionis," which we shall also examine in their place.

As an outcome of this story and the state of affairs to-day, when we see one branch of the Order of "the Strict Observance," dressed in brown, guarding the Portiuncula, and another branch of the Order of the "Large Observance," dressed in black, guarding the tomb of the saint, there has grown up

the idea that while Elias and his followers were indulgently living at the Sacro Convento, Bernard and the Old Companions were living franciscanly in their huts of mud and wattle, and that thus the division originated! No idea could be more utterly devoid of all historical warrant. As we have already described, the convent of the Portiuncula was a large, irregular mass of buildings, in which doubtless Elias and all the Companions lived together while the great church was being prepared. To this holy place the devotion of Thomas of Celano, "the official biographer," was no less great than that of the later writers of the "Spiritual Party." No rivalry existed between the shrines, the Home and the Tomb of the Poverello, until at least two centuries later, while, as to the beginnings of a division in the Order, these too we shall study in due course. That there were always slack men and strict men goes without saying; and personal friction even between saints must sometimes be hard to avoid. But the division was the work of smaller men of a later generation, who never knew St. Francis, and wished to cast the blame for their quarrels upon the dead.

II

The original Lower Church of St. Francis consisted of a vaulted sanctuary, nearly square, with a nave of three almost equal bays to east of it, transepts similarly vaulted to north and south, and a semicircular choir or apse to west. The ground-plan therefore formed a Tau or headless cross, Francis's mystic signature. The arches spring from low round piers projecting for about one-third of their diameter from the walls, and arches and archi-vaults alike are round, the diagonals therefore rising higher and causing each vault to form as it were a dome. The church was originally lighted by a single round-arched window in the wall of each bay and at the end of each transept, besides the three windows still existing in the apse; it must have been even darker than it is to-day. Directly above it, piers resting upon piers and walls on walls, was built a second round-arched church, similar in style, save that, instead of being vaulted like the Lower, it was simply roofed with beams and tiles, resting on wide round arches—like the contemporary Cathedral of S. Rufino and practically every Franciscan church built during the century. The Upper Church was lighted by plain lancet windows, without

tracery, and a simple rose or wheel window at its western end, and thus although much brighter than the Lower Church, it must have been equally solemn and austere.

Until quite recently, none of the learned critics, who discussed the architecture of the Basilica, had apparently climbed up over the present vaulting of the Upper Church and seen the original roof above it; but to-day, however, the researches of Prof. Supino, set forth in his splendid book on the Basilica of St. Francis, for which every lover of Assisi must be grateful, have put a great many controversies to rest.

Vasari accounted for the "German"—that is, Gothic or barbarous—architecture of the upper building by a story that Elias asked Frederick II for an architect, and a certain Jacopo Tedesco was sent him, notwithstanding the fact that neither in Germany nor in Northern Italy was there any building resembling the present Upper Church until quite twenty years later; but Vasari invariably makes a fearful hash of dates. Prof. Venturi believed that the upper building could not have been erected until about the middle of the century, and that then its forms must have been brought from France. But all the while there is the earlier church of Elias above and within the work of a generation later, differing but little from a hundred churches, already built or building throughout Italy, its sole unusual feature of the superimposition of one large church upon another being obviously dictated by the exigencies of its peculiar site and the purposes it served.

In the light of Prof. Supino's important discoveries, we see no reason to doubt that Elias was the chief architect. Unquestionably he had the official title of "Master of the Works." No other name has been suggested as the architect of S. Francesco at Cortona, though this too was a fine church. Elias is reputed to have built churches in Apulia, which stories, even if apocryphal, at least point to his architectural fame. Mindful of Francis's care to preserve the Portiuncula from the profanation of chance visitors. we cannot help feeling that Elias's idea was that the Upper Church should serve for public services and the Lower Church or crypt for conventual uses only. Entrance to the holier shrine should be the privilege of the few who would usually pass through the convent, which was to be occupied by a large number of friars, the bodyguard for the Treasure. For we must remember that at this time the city-walls did not reach down nearly to this point, but

ceased about a third of a mile away, towering above it on the crest of the precipice, close to the old Church of S. Giacomo, but most accessible by the gate at what is now known as the Old Seminary, then the Convent of S. Angelo di Panso. Any band of marauders could have rushed the open church and barred the friars out while they despoiled it. We should not forget, however, that the ravine which divided the Collis Infernus from the city hill was not filled up to form the Upper and Lower Piazza until the sixteenth century, and the road must have reached the convent by a bridge, originally perhaps in part a drawbridge. This would explain how the Popes came for a while to regard the Sacro Convento as the safest place in all Central Italy for the keeping of the Papal Treasure.

As for the actual workmen, it is extremely probable that Elias sent for the famous Comacine masons, and possibly that among them was one who was called Jacopo, Tedesco or Lombardo. But in view of the fact that the building which he helped to raise was not in its upper part a Gothic church, unique in ogival perfection for its period, but a fine, though unexceptional church of Lombard Romanesque, with some early Gothic features, the point of his being Lombard or German is immaterial. In the earliest scheme of decoration, such as survives in the lower nave, there are still to be seen eight-pointed stars and other Comacine symbols and interesting geometrical patterns on the arches, which doubtless are theirs also. Tombs of such men have been found in the charming little cloister adjoining the Basilica, and it is probable that, like the Cosmatesque mosaic and glass workers from Rome, they worked long and at several periods on the building.

The convent also was rapidly completed in its earliest form. The entrance was much farther back than it is now; for the present convent is of much later date. The old gate was beyond the bell-tower, in a line with the transepts. The great cloister, the splendid chapter-house and the marvellous terrace, overhanging the plain, with its wide view, are not the least of the wonders of Assisi. We believe that these were in the main Elias's plan, albeit much extended by later generations. You may quarrel with the expense of the great arches, the cloister and chapter-house, but the first may be put down to the score of defence, while, as for the latter, was the great business of the growing Order of many thousands of Brothers

and scores of provinces always to be conducted in an open field? There is no reason why the convent should be luxurious because it was magnificent. The policy of Elias was dictated, not only by his sense of dignity of the Order, but of the exigencies of the moment. While Francis was alive, the Brothers might be poor; when he was dead, they could be poor no longer, because they had inherited his body!

III

The Lower Church in its primitive form, and a considerable portion of the convent, were completed within twenty months of the day when Gregory laid the first stone on the morrow of the canonization. He had already declared the Basilica to be the Head and Mother-church of the Franciscan Order and taken it into the possession and protection of the Holy See. He sent it gifts innumerable, both spiritual and material —indulgences for its benefactors, a golden cross studded with precious stones containing a fragment of the true Cross, relics of other saints, and a large sum of money for the advancement of the building. On May 25th, 1230, took place the Translation of the body from the Church of St. George to its new resting-place.

The Pope was unable to be present owing to the disturbed state of Rome; but he was represented by three Legates and a hymn of his own composing. All Umbria came, the noble, clerical and lowly. The Legates with Elias laid the great sarcophagus, covered by an embroidered pall, a gift from Blanche of Castile, the Queen-Mother of France, on a splendid car drawn by white oxen, and the long procession of Brothers, priests and Bishops with the Podestà and the Priors in their crimson robes, proceeded in mediæval pomp down the streets that were strewn with box and hung with purple, amid a rain of flowers from the balconies and the sound of solemn chants and blare of trumpets.

Suddenly, when they neared the new Basilica, there was a riot, an eruption of armed men, who seized the bier, "laying their sacrilegious hands on what was holy"; the coffin was hurried into the church and the doors were closed in the face of the Legates, the Envoys, the Bishops, and the expectant throng! For three days the people raged; only after the crowd had melted away were the doors opened.

Another and less probable account is given by Eccleston,

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that when the procession was formed and went to bring the body from S. Giorgio, the people were told by the civic authorities that the Translation had already taken place three days before and that the saint was already buried in his church. Undeniably there was a riot, which was reported to Gregory, who threatened an Interdict, unless within a fortnight the Podestà and Priors made satisfaction. Elias was also indirectly punished; for the privileges of the new church were revoked. Albeit there is no evidence, there can be little question but that his hand was at the bottom of the affair, that fearing lest the body might be torn from the Order, he had plotted with the Assisan authorities.

Reading the final chapters of the "Legend of the Three Companions," or of the "Greater Legend" by St. Bonaventure, one would never guess but that the splendid ceremony had taken place precisely as it was designed. This makes the former story the more probable; the riot only occurred at the end. Even Salimbene seems to know nothing of the scandal. Yet we have the Papal Bull that cannot be denied; probably the Pope heard an exaggerated report from those excluded from the burial; it was not long before he restored the privileges.

Elias had buried the body in the church in such a way that no enemy should find it! Already the traffic in the saint's relics had begun. Jordan of Giano had gone back to Germany with a rich store of them. Elias knew the fanaticism of the mediæval crowd. We recall the pious body-snatching of the Venetians, the Pisans, and the Genoese from Eastern countries, and how the first stole St. Roch from Montpellier by a ruse. A few years later the body of St. Elizabeth was horribly mutilated by the relic-hunters. Over the funeral of St. Anthony of Padua in the very next year a regular battle took place. The Perugians set a guard around the dying Giles, lest his body should be taken to lie beside that of his Master, as he desired; the Assisans set a guard around the dying Clare. The Perugians in 1320 dug up and carried off from Bastia the body of the Blessed Conrad of Offida, and no less than three times in the course of subsequent centuries entered the Church of S. Francesco and began taking up the pavement. But the cunning of Elias and his comrades baffled them. Only in the year 1818, after six centuries, was a scientific search, armed with Papal Bull, successful in finding

the hidden treasure and hewing out a special shrine around it under the central altar of the Lower Church.

The latter-day romanticist laments that the Poverello was not buried at the Portiuncula or in some quiet field where the Sister Flowers might have sprung from his sacred dust. Had such sentiment been allowed to rule in the thirteenth century, the limbs of the Stigmatized would now be scattered in a score of jewelled reliquaries throughout the Christian world. That is the reason of the great Basilica and the apology of Elias.

CHAPTER IV

St. Anthony of Padua—His Church.

PERHAPS this point is the most opportune for the introduction of a brief account of that great saint, Anthony of Padua, whose life entwines but little with the life of Francis, but whose fame is always associated with his in the churches of the Order.

Fernandez dei Buglioni was born at Lisbon in 1195, of noble and wealthy parents; he was educated at the cathedral school; at fifteen he "entered into religion," becoming an Augustinian Canon in the convent of St. Vincent. This order was engaged in study, teaching, and parish work. So devoted was the boy to learning that before long he obtained permission to move to the Mother-house of his Order at Coimbra, in order to free himself from the frequent visits of his family and friends. It was not until he was twenty-five that he forsook this life of cloistral quiet, although at one time by reason of his gentle manners he seems to have been made Guest-Master of his large and hospitable community.

Not far from the Augustinian monastery at Coimbra was a poor little Franciscan hermitage, called St. Anthony of the Olives, wherein dwelt a few humble and unlettered friars. One day, as Guest-Master, Fernandez entertained five of them on their way from Italy to seek martyrdom in Morocco. Not long afterwards their mutilated bodies were brought back to the great convent church, encased in gorgeous reliquaries, precious beyond rubies for the mediæval world. The soul of the young Augustinian was fired to emulation; he covenanted with the surviving friars to join their Order on condition of being sent directly to Morocco.

It is difficult for us to conceive to-day this passion for martyrdom, this yearning to give life as a proof of love for Christ. The contemporary accounts of the miserable end of the five

enthusiasts leave no doubt as to the way they obtained their object. They made no effort to persuade the Moslems, to appeal to reason in order to convert them; they challenged them with insults, denounced their faith, and defied them to do their worst. It is clear that the authorities had no desire to kill them; they were deported on Christian ships; but returned and were scourged and imprisoned. They escaped, provoked a riot, risking the massacre of the entire Christian colony, and thus deliberately wore out the patience of the Emir. Finally, they obtained their desire—with much superadded torture, if we may believe the Christian chroniclers.

On receipt of the news there were passionate heart-searchings in half the convents of the Order. St. Francis was at the time in the East trying God's will for his life or death at the court of Malek-el-Kamil; St. Clare, we know, would have liked to have led her Poor Ladies to the trial. Fernandez with difficulty obtained permission to change his Order, taking the name of Anthony, and after possibly a few months' novitiate sailed for Morocco to be martyred. Sickness soon revealed to him that this was not God's will, so after passing the winter in North Africa he re-embarked for Portugal, but the elements intervened and a terrific storm threw him upon the coast of Sicily. Landing and lodging with the Friars Minor at Messina, he heard that St. Francis had returned from Syria and had summoned a Chapter-General to the Portiuncula.

At this Chapter of 1221 the Rule was first discussed, especially the question of the free wandering of the friars—and one feels that had Elias required an example he had only to cite the journey we have related. Was any youth who might take the cord to be allowed to wander thus at will, with Francis's name to supply his needs and his habit a passport into every land? Anthony hastened to Assisi, solitary and unknown, until of his own initiative at the close of the Chapter he put himself under obedience to Brother Gratian, Provincial Minister of the Romagna, and was sent to the little convent of Montepaolo near Forlì, where he served as chaplain for several months, while devoting himself at other times to solitary meditation.

Hitherto no one seems to have suspected his great power; but suddenly, at a time when the Founder of the Order,

weakened by fever and incipient blindness, was more and more withdrawing himself from apostolacy to contemplation, in Anthony a spiritual force arose, moving all northern Italy. No phenomenon is more extraordinary in the history of the Order than the emergence of this shy, unnoticed friar into the glory of the apostolic life of effluent grace and miracle.

The earliest indication of his extraordinary power came at an ordination service at Forlì, to which certain friars to be ordained were sent from the hermitage of Montepaolo. After the service some one was asked to preach, and every one else declining to address without preparation an assembly which included many distinguished prelates, Anthony was ordered to do so by his superior and mounted the pulpit blushing and trembling, seeking what he should say. He found such eloquence that his inspiration was acknowledged and thenceforward in every city through the north of Italy his task was to preach and convert the heretics.

Be it confessed that the sermons as they have come down to us are to our modern notions unconvincing. They are rhapsodies of burning rhetoric, full of scriptural and patristic quotations, interpreted allegorically, of far-fetched allusions and strained etymologies; all we can suppose is that what he wrote in his mediæval Latin, at the bidding of the Cardinal Protector of the Order, gives no adequate idea of what he poured out to the people, probably in the vernacular, that "Gallo-Italic" dialect which would have been comprehensible to the unlettered crowd alike in Padua, Verona, Arles, even perhaps as far north as Limoges. Everywhere the crowds that flocked to hear him were so great that no churches could contain them; he was usually compelled to preach in the open square. His eloquence and his miracles were directed especially against the heretics, whose doctrines, fostered by the Ghibelline or Imperial German faction, flourished, above all, in the Ghibelline cities.

It was at Rimini that we are told his first miracle occurred, when in answer to his challenge a heretic led forth his mule and Anthony came from his convent with the Host, and the beast knelt down before the upraised Pyx, to the amazement of the crowd that had assembled! It was at Rimini too, when the heretics would not hear him, that he repaired to the seashore and preached to the fish, of whom thousands

approached and apparently listened from the waters, holding out their heads and not departing till he blessed them. On another occasion, while he was expounding the mystery of the Incarnation, the figure of the Infant Christ was seen standing on his book; at the funeral of a miser he declared that the heart would be found among his money-bags, the congregation opened his coffer and his breast and literally found that it was so!

It is easy to say that all these "miracles" are realistic interpretations of parables drawn from Anthony's sermons, as repeated and materialized by the wonder-loving crowd; but the fact remains that the Order had found a preacher whose eloquence and personal charm ran like new magic through the world. His preaching was, for Lombardy, Venetia, Romagna and the south of France, what that of Francis had been for Umbria and the Marches. It met the needs of the province and the period, being by its rhapsodic and at the same time intellectual qualities perfectly adapted to attract the different audience, the cleverer, quicker, worldlier and more prosaic race that dwells to the north of the Apennines from the Adriatic to the Pyrenees.

Of Anthony's relations with Francis we know little, and we cannot help feeling that in Anthony we have in truth the first example of the "New Flower" of the Order, the "Anthos Neon" as the punning chroniclers would have it, the forerunner of the New Men that Elias's schools were already beginning to attract. For with all his humility, his gentleness and sweetness there certainly are moments when the figure of St. Anthony hardly fits into the primitive Umbrian frame.

For about two years he remained in France and we hear of him as Guardian or Custos of Limoges with jurisdiction over subsidiary convents. Many episodes are told of his work as Superior and Director; they show a tenderness and tact equal to that of St. Francis or St. Bernard.

On Francis's death he returned to Italy, summoned probably as Custos of Limoges to the Chapter at the Portiuncula in May 1227, which chose John Parenti as Minister-General, as we have already related. By Parenti Anthony was appointed Provincial of the Romagna, which post he seems to have held until the next Chapter of 1230.

But the history of these Chapters is curiously confused,

owing to the efforts of the subsequent opponents of Elias to pervert it in order to throw opprobrium on his name. The picturesque, but quite untrustworthy, accounts of our English Eccleston, who wrote from distant and prejudiced hearsay, do not much enlighten us. It is clear that Anthony formed part of the deputation to the Pope, which obtained the Bull "Quo Elongati," interpreting the Rule in the larger sense and definitely setting aside the poverty and privilege clauses in the Will of Francis; and that therefore he belonged to the party of the Large Observance, and recognized, with Elias and against the Rigorists, the fact that the enormous growth of the Order made imperative some mitigation of its primitive ideals. For the rest, at the Chapter of 1230 there was no election, so that the stories of a discussion between Anthony and Elias, contained in the "Speculum Vitæ"—like the "Speculum Perfectionis," a partisan book of the fourteenth century—fall to the ground, with the attempt to set the great name of Anthony at the head of the opposition to authority.

Anthony when at Rome obtained from the Pope release from all official duties in order to devote the rest of his life to preaching—and notwithstanding his bodily suffering, for he was now dying of dropsy, he went straight to Padua and embarked upon the last year of his apostolacy. He found the city in the throes of strife, heresy and extravagance, one particularly evil custom being the imprisonment or the enslavement of debtors, that constantly gave rise to robbery and assassination; to remedy which the saint secured the passing of a merciful law of bankruptcy. He bearded the tyrant Ezzelino at Verona, seeking, though unsuccessfully, the release of the Guelph prisoners. He constantly denounced the materialist heresies—denial of the Sacraments, denial of the priesthood—that were fostered by the Ghibellines with intent to undermine the power of the priesthood and the Church; and everywhere miracles witnessed to his words. To our modern minds many of these latter are more curious than convincing, but we must remember that they formed an integral part of the mediæval world. But no miracle prolonged his most exhausting life.

In a wood near the little convent of St. Peter outside Padua, the saint found a great walnut tree with large low-spreading boughs. Loving the birds and the wild creatures almost as

much as did St. Francis, he explained his fanciful caprice to the owner of the land and a little cell of mats and brushwood was built for him up in the boughs. Here amid the leaves, in the bright month of June, he thought that he could forget the troubles of the world, and refresh his soul with meditation upon the mysteries. Yet not for long, as, feeling that this fancy must be a cause of care to the Brothers who had charge of him, he soon asked to be taken back to his convent of St. Mary. But knowing he was nigh to death, all the convents wanted him, and the little party were persuaded to turn aside to a house of the Poor Ladies, called l' Arcella, situated in the suburb of Capo di Monte ; and it was there he died.

Then began a most mediæval struggle for his body. The men of Padua marched out to take it, the men of Capo di Monte set up barricades and prepared to resist to the last. Crowds broke into the convent, carried off relics ; there was danger lest the miracle-working treasure should be torn in pieces. The Brothers were reinforced and succeeded once more in getting hold of the body, enclosed it in a coffin and temporarily buried it. A fearful riot followed on the rumour that it had been stolen ; it had to be dug up and exhibited to a deputation. Padua built a fine new bridge of boats for the procession to the city ; Capo di Monte captured and utterly destroyed it. Finally the Priors, the Provincial and the Bishop, meeting in conference at the Communal Palace, decided to summon all the citizens of Padua and Capo di Monte to a general Assembly, at which the men of the recalcitrant suburb were surrounded and distrained, while the Bishop went in solemn procession to l' Arcella and brought the body finally in triumph to St. Mary's, where it was once more buried while the great church was building.

Forty-seven miracles were submitted for examination, of which no less than forty-six were done at his tomb and only one during his life. The Commission for the canonization consisted of the Bishop of Padua with the Priors of the Benedictines and of the Dominicans, that is to say, the heads of the rival ecclesiastical powers ; the Cause was carried in the course of a few months and Anthony was canonized on May 30th, 1232, within a year of his death, whereupon the city which had secured his relics determined on the erection of a magnificent Basilica, larger and grander than its sister of Assisi.

II

The great Church of S. Antonio at Padua, popularly known as "Il Santo," is, alike by order of time, by sanctity and by artistic importance, the second Franciscan shrine in Italy. Yet, gazing at its seven domes and its several slender campanili, that soar up like elaborate minarets, one feels that this strange, exotic, oriental building has but little in harmony with the Franciscan spirit. Unless it be St. Mark's at Venice, its architectural parent, or Milan Cathedral, or St. Peter's at Rome, we can recall no such beautiful and important church in the whole country that contrasts more strongly with the Basilica at Assisi. For whereas the chief notes of the latter are simplicity and sentiment, "Il Santo" suggests grandeur and exuberant fantasy. Never was a more curious compound of incongruous elements welded together than in this extraordinary edifice—Romanesque in its façade, Gothic in its chief structural features, Venetian, Byzantine, even Arabic, in its cupolas and campanili—the very negation of that Franciscan naturalism whereby buildings were, at least in plan, simple, severe and practical, albeit often afterwards gradually enriched by the gratitude and piety of succeeding generations.

Doubtless the explanation of this artistic paradox lies in the history of its creation, designed as it was by Nicholas the Pisan—at least, according to Vasari—erected at the expense of the Paduan Municipality, whose pious enthusiasm and civic pride doubtless desired magnificence, and destined for the use of the Order before its compromise with Poverty in its great, bare, barn-like churches had been determined by the completion of Elias's simple, aisleless and wooden-roofed Upper Church. It was begun almost immediately after St. Anthony's canonization; interrupted by the long Paduan war against the hideous tyranny of Ezzelino; carried on vigorously after the latter's fall in 1259; and completed, in all its principal features, by 1307.

It is not part of our task here to describe its glories, chief among which are many wonderful reliefs in bronze by the hand of Donatello, for these great works, like the fine sculptures of the sixteenth-century chapel of the saint, the many splendid tombs of the mighty dead, the bronzen gates, the glorious candelabrum, the gorgeous reliquaries in the Treasury, even the most fascinating frescoes of the Life and Miracles of St.

James by Altichieri da Zevio in the Chapel of St. Felix, are not of our province, not truly Franciscan, although, taken as a whole, the story of this treasure-house is not without much instruction for our history.

For it offers a conspicuous example of what subsequently took place in many other Franciscan churches, where a strong city seized on a Franciscan saint and exalted him in a temple of civic pride. The saint became the symbol of the city's glory; his fame a measure of its prestige abroad; thousands of pilgrims flocked to his shrine upon the annual festival, and returning carried to their distant homes stories that sensibly enhanced the reputation of the ruling house and the eminent citizens, and furthered the city's policy and the extension of its trade. All this and much more was achieved for Padua by the great saint whom she had contrived to bury within the circuit of her walls.

But it must not be assumed that the motives of the communes were exclusively material; the citizens unquestionably believed that their patron saint not only defended their town, their homes and vital interests, but also provided for their souls in the future life. Their devotion insisted on their bodies being buried in as close proximity to his as possible; wherefore around his church chapels were built, often in eager competition, and adorned with rich marbles or frescoed by some famous artist of the day. In the case of the Franciscans, the fact that they owned no property was a reason why their churches became so rich; for in the case of influential donors the guardian of a convent would have little or no power to refuse a gift or legacy, notwithstanding any scruples about accepting it.

With respect to this vast and gorgeous temple in honour of the second Saint of the Order of Holy Poverty, designed and begun on a far more sumptuous scale than Elias's Basilica in Assisi, why are the critics of the latter silent? Is it not because it is admitted that "Il Santo" of Padua is a communal affair? But if a city could so put aside the testament of St. Francis, why not a Pope, supported by half the sovereigns of Christendom? Given the piety, the civic pride, the rising wealth and the artistic impulse of the thirteenth century, the development and enrichment of the Franciscan churches was inevitable. "Il Santo" of Padua, like S. Francesco of Assisi, is but a prototype.

THE CHURCH OF ST. ANTHONY, PADUA

For in truth the city had secured a world-wide intercessor, whose fame as wonder-worker is even vaster than St. Francis's. No service is too great or too trivial for his kindness, and so it comes about in every Catholic country that no statue has to-day so many kindled tapers as that of St. Anthony in his brown habit, with his lily and the Christ-child in his arms.

CHAPTER V

The Church Elias built—The Generalate of Elias—Its Great Merits —Its Defects—The Fall—The Apostacy and End of Elias.

I

AFTER five years of the weak rule of honest John Parenti the affairs of the Order were in such confusion that all the more able men clamoured for Elias's return. But, besides being occupied by his work on the Basilica, Elias was now in feeble health and reluctant to resume the thankless task of keeping the "Zelanti" from wandering beyond obedience. He pleaded that he was ill, that he could neither walk nor fast, and that the man who had to enforce the Rule ought at least to be able to keep it. But the Brothers would not listen. At the General Chapter of May 1233, held in the Episcopal Palace at Rieti, they called upon John Parenti to resign. He wept and said "he knew he was not worthy to rule over the religion." It is reported, to his credit, that "he had the gift of tears." They answered Elias that he could keep a horse, and as for his fasting, he could eat gold, if he liked. Finally he accepted; it is said that his more ardent followers lifted him up bodily and placed him in Parenti's seat before he was elected. But hopelessly confused is the account of this episode, which in later days was distorted to Elias's discredit.

It is clear that he held the respect of the greatest spirits of the Order, and not least of the three saints. We have seen what St. Francis thought of him, while St. Clare remained his friend through all the troubles. "Follow the counsel of our father, Brother Elias, General of the whole Order," she wrote to the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia; "set these same counsels ever before thee as more fitting to be followed than all others and a treasure more precious than any other gift." In certain most important questions St. Anthony of Padua undoubtedly upheld his point of view.

Possibly the influence of Gregory had been the decisive factor in the Chapter, for the Pope, in deposing him six years later, said that he had chosen him because the Brothers wanted a strong man; but evidently Elias was popular with the rank and file of the Order, whereas the Zealots for the Rule were not. It was felt that he was the only man capable of sustaining the dignity of the Order, of controlling the extremists, of organizing schools and missions—in a word, of carrying the movement to the full height of its unprecedented opportunities.

Elias had made his conditions before accepting office; it is said that he fully availed himself of the licence they accorded. The Brothers promised him a horse; he is reported to have kept a stable of fine palfreys. They shouted that he might eat gold; he is said to have had a famous cook, one Brother Bartholomew of Padua, and henceforth to have dined but seldom in the refectory, preferring quiet meals in the seclusion of his own apartments. The tales are told of him by his enemies and especially by that unconscionable gossip Brother Salimbene, who above all things loved a good story, whether precisely true or not. At all events, for the Order, Elias's work was worth the scandal.

By about the year 1236 the actual structure of the Assisan churches in their original form was finished, that is, two stately but simple churches one above the other, the Lower for conventual use, little more than a glorified crypt, dark, plain, austere; the Upper for sermons and ceremonies, light and lofty, with high round arches supporting a wooden roof, like many similar buildings all over Italy.

The decoration of the Lower Church possibly consisted of simple patterns of geometrical severity on the plastered walls and arches, if at this time it was decorated at all, whereas the Upper Church was probably quite bare, as there is no trace of plaster upon the arches that Prof. Supino has found above the Gothic vaults. The only ornament that we know of was a gigantic crucifix, painted for Elias by his friend Giunta Pisano, a wooden cross of Byzantine form on a beam, with painted Figure, like that of S. Damiano which spoke to Francis, but of somewhat livelier feeling, and at the foot of the cross the kneeling figure of Elias, carrying a scroll inscribed with his name and a curious rhyming prayer for mercy. This picture has been claimed as one of the earliest authentic

portraits in the revival of western art. The crucifix was erected on a beam over the choir and there remained until the seventeenth century, when it was taken down during some alterations and never put up again.

The only sculptural decoration attributed to this period is the frieze of wild beasts in Romanesque style on the façade of the Upper Church with the emblems of the four Evangelists round the rose-window and the eagles at the corner, the symbols of Pope Gregory, not of the Emperor Frederick, as has repeatedly been stated. These works are all of rude and obviously local workmanship.

The splendid bell-tower was also the creation of Elias. On the largest of the bells, founded and hung by a certain Bartholomew of Pisa in 1238, there was inscribed his name as Minister-General of the Order, beside that of Pope Gregory and of the Emperor Frederick, "Cæsaris ac Potentissimi Federici." This great bell, according to Salimbene, was very splendid and sonorous and, together with the other five, gladdened the whole valley with its sound. The belfry, tall as it is, was then still higher, for it was crowned with a spire, taken down in the sixteenth century, but still to be seen in ancient prints. Originally the round buttress-towers had spires also, with possibly a walk all round the roof. The building in Elias's day, both without and within, must have been even more like a fortress than it is to-day, simple, severe and solemn, yet strong enough to baulk the greed of those fanatical times.

II

At the risk of becoming tedious it grows necessary to face a serious consideration of the two ideals that divided the allegiance of the Order at this period, and still divide its many modern students. Seeing its vast importance, the quarrel should be regarded from the larger standpoint of human history. For nearly a thousand years—say, from the fifth to the fourteenth century—no institution served mankind so richly as Monasticism. In an age of darkness, strife and feudal anarchy, consequent on the decline of the power of Rome and the subjugation of the Western world by the Teutonic races, the Benedictine Orders forsook the anarchy of ruined cities, and, building themselves peaceful homes in distant hills and quiet valleys, devoted their life to prayer, study and agricultural labour. They worked the land, drained, dyked

the marshes, preserved and copied manuscripts. To them we mainly owe, besides our agriculture, our inheritance of the ancient classic literature, with all its treasury of thought and beauty, and the secrets of such crafts and sciences as were transmitted, not so much through literature as by the unbroken chain of technical tradition.

Now this great task was nearly over. Feudalism was passing away in the more progressive countries. The hopes of human betterment lay once more with the trading towns, that were now strong enough to receive the heritage. Francis appeared, as we have seen, at a moment of transition; if his sons took so large a part in forming the new world, using his inspiration to the fullest, that is chiefly due to the direction of Elias.

If the Zealots had had their way, his Rule, in itself but a small expression of his great inspiring dream, would have been interpreted in its literal, narrowest, and most material sense. There would have been no friaries in great cities, but only a host of tiny hermitages scattered upon a thousand hill-tops with little hostels for a few Brothers in the vicinity of the towns. Friars, barefoot, ragged, ignorant, singly or in pairs, would have wandered about the roads, without control or licence, singing, preaching, begging; or would have lurked in cells or caves, forgotten by the world. Inevitably, as the force of their first inspiration dwindled, the Order would have waned or perished from persecution; for who could have guarded a thousand hermits from the seeds of the mystic heresies or checked those wanderers who were merely tramps, from preaching schism and rebellion? At the best, the Order would have been no more than a lingering echo of the age that was passing, picturesque perhaps to us, but powerless and ineffectual. Haply it might have borne a few wild flowers of poetry, sheltered another, but unknown, Giles, and a happier Jacopone; but it could not have held strong souls, such as Giotto or Alighieri, nor sent forth great masters of the human mind, such as Bacon and Bonaventure. Giotto could never have painted its Founder as a column that underpinned the falling Lateran, or Dante sung of him as standing by the side of Dominic, like Seraph by Cherub at the Almighty Throne.

Fortunately for mankind, Elias realized the vast potentialities of Francis's inspiration, and following the Dominican

example, caused Schools of Theology to be opened and incited the friars to study at the great universities of Europe. In the next few generations the Order produced a glory of learning, hardly inferior to that of the Brothers Preachers: Bacon, Bonaventure, Scotus, Marsh, Middleton, Ockham, Alexander of Hales, John of Parma, Nicholas de Lira, Raymond Lully, Robert of Bastia, Francesco de Maironis, and many more, whose thoughts may well be in our minds though we do not recall their names. Together with the great Dominicans, these bore their part in building the foundations of the world in which we live. For their teaching was not that of the mediæval doctors; it had just the same spirit of life, of concrete actuality, which those Umbrian and other audiences found in the unlearned sermons of Francis.

Then, Elias planted friaries—not mere hospices or hostels, but convents to hold scores or hundreds of friars—not on the mountains, like the Benedictines, but in the very heart of the most populous cities, and preferably among the meanest streets. He tore the reluctant hermits from their eyries and forced them to work among the poor. Moreover, he bade them study medicine for their greater competence to tend the sick. In times of pestilence they were to nurse, to comfort, shrive or bury; in times of tumult they were to preach, and peace was to be their message. They were to live among the lepers, the beggars, the diseased, the deformed, the criminals; they were not to shun the crowds, but to seek them. Meanwhile, by their church services they were to uplift the people, to bring order, beauty and holiness into wretched lives. For their aim was not to be so much the salvation of their own souls as those of other men by their practical apostolacy.

Moreover, Elias sent out many missions into Moslem countries, to convert, when Dominic, and even Anthony, were more actively co-operating with the military crusades. Who shall say but that here, too, Elias was not most truly interpreting the spirit of his leader? Finally, in causing the Order to become an international diplomatic organ for negotiations between warlike potentates, was he not moving on a road that must have furthered the world's peace? Was there no place for its disinterested mediation, and would not such a task have been consistent with its first ideals? At least, such great and holy men as John of Parma thought so.

What strikes one chiefly in all these activities is Elias's marvellous perception of the spirit of the new age. For though by origin an Umbrian villager, he rose far out of the provincial; whereas the mountain hermitages of his opponents remained for the most part an Umbrian characteristic. The first Houses in England were at London, Oxford, Canterbury: in Germany at Würtzburg, Mainz, Cologne, Saltzburg, Regensburg and other populous cities. In such foundations, even in Francis's lifetime, we see Elias's hand. Truly have England and Germany good reason to be grateful to Elias! For, in short, it was he who made the Order the force that it became in the succeeding century. He found it a sweet spiritual dream, a path through Poverty to Paradise; he left it a Power, stronger than half the kingdoms, and infinitely more creative and enduring.

III

But these great qualities and achievements of Elias were counterbalanced by unquestionable defects, which as time went on grew ever more intolerable. From the Pope's great palace at Assisi he ruled the provinces despotically, dividing them till there were no fewer than seventy-two, and creating for their administration a vast bureaucracy of laymen, directly dependent on himself. After 1233 he summoned no more triennial Chapters-General, regarding them as an expense, a source of confusion and possibly of discord in the Order. The days were passed when three thousand men could camp out under the trees around the Portiuncula, making themselves little huts of boughs or reeds, could laugh and sing with God-intoxicated merriment, as Jordan of Giano tells of the famous Chapter of Mats, and, to the amazement of observers, leave all their commissariat to Providence, and find ample supply for every need in the charity of neighbouring towns. In short, the age of the miracle had passed into an age of organization; and the Chapters, from a purely administrative view, were a hindrance and a disorder. To take their place as a centralizing instrument Elias sent visitors to all the provinces, to give instructions, to collect money, to make reports for his own private use. They were usually laymen and, it was said, unlettered; whereas the Order was becoming an Order of learned "Clerks." In any case, they were intensely unpopular, especially in England where the visitations of a certain

most inquisitorial German lawyer, Wyger, brought matters to a head. The Scottish province refused to recognize him; the English Provincial Minister, Aymon of Faversham, summoned a Chapter to Oxford which decided to make formal protest to the Pope. The very success of Elias in drawing so much intellect into the Order was now to be his ruin. He could not expect to rule men such as Aymon, Arnulf, Adam Marsh and Alexander of Hales, in the way that he ruled the simple first companions, Giles, Angelo, Bernard, Leo, who were living the Gospel life in distant hermitages in their ancient way, cherishing their memories of the Poverello.

It seems to be quite a mistake to imagine that the downfall of Elias was connected with the relaxation of the Rule that he is considered to have favoured and the great churches of Assisi that he built. It would have been impossible to accuse Elias on this score to the Pope, who really was chief creator of the building. The attack on his authority was inspired by other motives, and developed along quite other lines.

In the first place, Elias had the supreme defect of all great organizing spirits; his system was over-centralized and lacking in elasticity. Secondly, he paid no account to national prejudices and distinctions. For example, in England the popular dislike of foreign prelates was a factor which Kings, such as Henry III, had been forced to heed, while the interference of Pope Innocent in favour of his vassal John strongly contributed to bring that potentate to Runnymede. Above all else, popular feeling in the provinces objected to the sending of large sums of money to Italy; the year 1235 in England marks the very climax of this crisis; and money was precisely what Elias wanted. Lastly, both he and his agents were laymen, than which there could be no greater insult—Eccleston says.

The provincial Ministers, led by Aymon, who had once been a strong supporter of Elias against the Zealots, took council together and met delegates from France and Germany at Rome, whither they went armed with letters of recommendation from Grossetête, saintly Bishop of Lincoln. He too had once been a friend and correspondent of Elias's, but the growing scandal alienated him. The Pope was at first reluctant to give audience to the malcontents, who had come from all parts of Europe to complain against his friend. They presented a deed of accusation, summing up their grievances. Gregory

sent them back to their provinces, with orders to elect delegates to a commission that should draw up their proposed reforms. He summoned a Chapter-General to meet in Rome at Pentecost 1239.

When it met, the Pope, supported by seven Cardinals, attended it in person and opened it with an appropriate sermon. Evidently he was inclined to support the authority of the man who had been so successful in carrying out his policy. At first Elias answered calmly, but as discussion warmed he grew more restive. He declared that they had forced him to accept the arduous post, and that he had warned them that he could not observe the Rule, as a Minister should do, in view of his ill-health and heavy labours. As for the money, the great Basilica was its fruit; here he believed that he had the support of the Pope. Gregory nodded approvingly, for he probably knew quite well that the true grievance of the opposition, which had drawn these learned clerics from distant parts of Europe, lay not at all in the charges they put forward. But the Englishmen persisted, until Elias lost his temper, and, it is said, gave Aymon the lie direct. A vulgar tumult followed, most unseemly in the Papal presence, in the course of which several voices called on Elias to resign his office into Gregory's hands, which he foolishly refused to do at his foes' bidding. If this be the true story, possibly the spirit of the old Conti rose in wrath against the Bombarone's lack of breeding and the noise of his wild unlettered laymen, provoked by the withering sarcasms of the English scholars. The Pope rose and imposed silence, telling the Assembly that he had chosen Elias on account of his love for Francis and because it seemed to him that the Brothers wished for a man of power. If they wished for him no longer, he would accept his resignation. So Elias fell; but he had done his work.

The Chapter proceeded to elect Albert of Pisa, Minister of the English province, but he died within a year, whereupon Aymon of Faversham, Englishman born, was elected in his stead. The English must have had a strong influence in the development of the Order at this period and, being mostly scholars of Oxford and Paris, they carried it very far along the road.

Aymon of Faversham was "Magna theologus," and the chief feature of his generalate was the definite triumph of Paris over Assisi. He caused the simple office of St. Francis

to be carefully revised by his best scholars, and besides making the Chapters-General of the Ministers and Guardians supreme in every matter, he established the principle that laymen should henceforth be forbidden to hold office. One of Eccleston's chief grievances against Elias seems to have been that he allowed any Brother to come to the Chapters, for the real motive for the rebellion against him lay in the jealousy and contempt of the Northern Clerics for him and his fellow-laymen, who rode roughshod over the prejudices of their scholarly and priestly caste.

If the Zealots were sincere in their complaint against Elias for causing the Rule to be relaxed by privileges and dispensations, they assuredly could have had but little consolation from the subsequent regime of the Doctors; in two years, Albert of Pisa and Aymon of Faversham obtained from the Papal Curia seven times as many as had Elias in the whole period of his administration! For the centralized autocracy of the days of Francis, with its triennial Chapter of the whole Order, was now substituted an oligarchy of provincial officials —priests—whose influence and position depended on the privileges with which they returned from each visit to Italy. It is curious indeed to note how consistently Elias has been blamed for the actions of his successful opponents, but the reason may easily be found in his subsequent conduct, whereby he branded himself for ever as the scapegoat of the Order.

IV

Elias retired to Cortona and wrote a letter of apology and submission to Gregory, entrusting it to Albert of Pisa, his successor in the generalship. It was found undelivered in the latter's pocket, at his death a few months later. Efforts at reconciliation from both sides were vitiated by calumny and mutual distrust. Elias knew his enemies too well to hope for reconciliation, and meanwhile, being relatively friendless and without a defender, he might well fear arrest and lifelong imprisonment. There remained, however, another way back into power and favour, namely by restoring the peace between Emperor and Pope, which lately after nine years' truce had been broken. If any man could do such a thing it was Elias, for he was by far the ablest of the liberal prelates, with knowledge of the world and the personal goodwill of both Gregory and Frederick, with both of whom he had been on terms of

friendship. Moreover, during his generalate he had frequently used the prestige of the Order as an instrument of peace and arbitration between warring families and cities ; as for instance, between Spoleto and Cerreto in August 1233, and on many other occasions ; in which policy he was surely acting in the spirit of the Founder, who had many times adjusted civic and family strife.

It is said that he explained this motive to the Pope in the letter which he entrusted to Albert of Pisa but which was not delivered ; without waiting for an answer, he joined Frederick at Faenza, notwithstanding the fact that the Emperor and all who followed him had been excommunicated in the previous year. Unfortunately the Pope straightway excommunicated Elias also, whereupon the Emperor gave out to the world that Gregory had dismissed him because he had always laboured for peace between Church and Empire. Frederick patronized Elias and took him about with him on his campaigns, but did not follow his policy ; in his truculence and obstinacy was Elias's final ruin—and eventually perhaps his own. For he banished the friars from his dominions, a measure that was unjustly attributed to Elias, but which was also a capital error on the Emperor's part, as the Order was already a powerful factor in every court of Europe. Indeed, it would not be difficult to maintain that the hostility of the Franciscans was one of the main causes of the downfall of the Hohenstaufen. But for the time the Emperor's star seemed to be in the ascendant and he was in no mood for reconciliation, while on his part Gregory, brought to bay, was planning extreme spiritual measures.

For notwithstanding the steady growth of the larger industrial towns and their binding together into National Guelph alliances, such as the Lombard League, against the Imperial power, yet at this moment the superior unity of command gave great advantage to the Emperor, whose forces were able to move about Italy from his Kingdom of Germany on the northern frontier to his Kingdom of Apulia in the south by means of the smaller Ghibelline cities and the feudal villages and castles.

As he moved about the country he punished the Guelph towns by harrying their lands or terrorizing them by bands of Saracen or German mercenaries—such as he established in the Castle of Nocera, henceforth known as " Nocera dei

Mori," whose roving ruffianism, as we shall see, was confronted by the gallantry of St. Clare. Such odds as these obliged the Pope to have recourse to spiritual weapons, and now in the year 1243 nonagenarian Gregory, refusing to make peace and abandon the Lombard League, summoned a General Council to the Lateran with intent to proclaim a crusade against the Emperor and to rouse the neutral sovereigns and the Catholics of Germany.

But this Council never met; for the Emperor held the roads, and his fleet, in alliance with the Pisan fleet, commanded the middle sea. The Genoese escort was defeated off the Island of Meloria and its convoy of Cardinals and prelates was captured and conveyed to Naples, where it languished in Imperial custody. Our old friend Cardinal Ugolino, Pope Gregory, died baffled, but still at bay. The Conclave of eight Cardinals met and a new Pope was elected, Godfrey of Milan, Celestine IV, the Emperor's candidate; he too died in a few days. Then for nearly two years the Papal throne was vacant, for the Cardinals under the perpetual threat of violence could come to no decision. The Kings of France and England remonstrated with the Emperor, who naturally threw the blame upon the Cardinals. Finally, they elected Sinibaldo Fiesco, Innocent IV, an old friend of Frederick's, who none the less cried when he heard the news, "No Pope can be a Ghibelline!" For a few months indeed a lasting peace seemed possible; a treaty was drawn up and sworn; but in execution it broke down. Neither side could trust the other, and, moreover, in every city were smouldering feuds that at any moment might set the world aflame.

Innocent IV did not repeat Gregory's tactical error; by a ruse he baffled the Imperial guard and escaped from Italy. Genoese ships, awaiting him at Civita Vecchia, conveyed him to Marseilles, whence he pressed on to Lyons and thither summoned the Council which deposed the Emperor in 1246.

After that solemn deed the war grew more implacable. The efforts of the Guelphs were strongly stimulated. In 1248, the Imperial army was surprised by the beleaguered citizens of Parma who pillaged its sumptuous camp and treasure; in 1249 the Emperor's son, the young King Enzo, was captured in a skirmish by the Bolognese; then Frederick seemed to be deserted or betrayed by his chief followers, and before the end of the year 1250 was dead; whereupon half the sovereigns

of Christendom offered their swords to defend their father, the Pope!

V

Now if we try to fit Elias's effort at conciliation into the framework of these great events, we see it was doomed to failure. A few months earlier Frederick might have compromised; but in the beginning of 1240 he was smarting from the excommunication, inebriated by his first military successes, and determined not to be daunted by the menace of a Council whose meeting he was confident he could prevent. On the other hand, Elias's own excommunication naturally deprived him of all prestige and authority, for there is no position more false, even in the eyes of the most worldly people, than that of an ecclesiastic at variance with his Church. Vain was Elias's dream of getting back to Gregory as Ambassador of the Emperor with tolerable terms; the Emperor advanced on Rome; the Council was summoned; and off Meloria the Papal plans were swallowed by the sea. Elias's strength with Frederick lay in the fact of Gregory's friendship, the possibility that the old man in his extremity might listen to one with whom he had collaborated for over twenty years. Vast hordes of Mongols were moving to the destruction of Christendom over the plains of Hungary; the Christian Emperor was advancing to attack its capital; through Narni, Rieti, Tivoli, he approached the gates of Rome. Fever and the August heat and his many sorrows closed on Gregory; he was almost a hundred years old!

That this dream of Elias was not altogether so impossible is shown by the fact that two years later he was despatched by Frederick on an almost equally important embassy to the Court of Constantinople, where he was received with honour and sent back with presents, the chief one being a relic of the True Cross, which in its beautiful ivory reliquary he presented to his Church of St. Francis at Cortona. A fragment of the True Cross given by a schismatic sovereign to an unfrocked friar for his services as Ambassador of an excommunicated Emperor is a curious piece of mediævalism!

Innocent IV called Elias to the Chapter-General which met at Genoa on the death of Aymon, and for a moment there seemed to be the possibility of a reconciliation, for the Pope would have liked to regain the services of so able an adherent.

But Elias distrusted him, knowing the bitterness of his enemies, and clave to Frederick, whereupon he was excommunicated again and expelled from the Order. The Chapter chose Crescentius of Jesi, who ruled mainly upon Elias's lines until 1247, when he was succeeded by the second greatest figure in the Franciscan Minister-Generalship, John of Parma, whose history must occupy us later. This saintly man made overtures towards his outlawed predecessor, but although Elias readily declared he would willingly submit to Brother John, yet he feared that the Pope would imprison him, if he left Cortona.

For the offer came when the death of the Emperor Frederick had deprived him of his defender. He must now have been nigh upon seventy years of age and he shrank from such an ordeal. In Cortona, that venerable high-placed city which stands so proudly on its mountain throne, dominating the wide valley of the Chiana, Brother "the Lord Elias" was living as a prince, protected by immemorial Etruscan ramparts, flattered by Ghibelline burghers, and surrounded by a large band of friars who had cast in their lot with his. The city had made over to him valuable land, "the Queen's Bath," as it was called, and thereon he was building a new church and convent, which, if it has not the adornments of generations of rich and royal lovers of St. Francis, is yet by no means unworthy of its sister of Assisi. Indeed, as one stands in its spacious and lofty nave, one feels that before it suffered seventeenth-century restoration, it must have singularly resembled the original Upper Church. Aisleless, but well-proportioned, wooden-roofed, with vaulted sanctuary, lit by broad lancet windows and a great rose at the west end, its plain, severe, but noble lines gave the true model of Franciscan churches. Here too there was once a crypt, a Lower Church, which later centuries filled in with rubble. But enough remains of this degraded and neglected structure to witness to the piety of its excommunicated builder and to answer the slanders brought against his faith.

His last days were overshadowed by the excommunication, which constantly weighed more heavily upon his mind. When Giles in his little cell close to Perugia first heard of it, he is reported to have flung himself upon the ground and grovelled in the dust. "I want to get down so low," he said, "as so great a man has fallen!" Even in Cortona a party was stirred

up against him, if we can believe the story that the children were taught to sing certain mocking rhymes that reached his ears. He is accused of alchemy ; it was popularly believed that he had had dealings with the Devil. There was no limit to the slanders. Yet even his fiercest enemies admit that he was the greatest man in Italy in his day.

The old man is reported to have sat for hours together, beating his breast and repeating over and over again, " Alas ! how great a sinner I have been and am, and how vainglorious ! Spare me, O Lord, and enter not into judgment with Thy servant ! " We are reminded of his portrait on Giunta Pisano's great crucifix with his Miserere in his hand, and of his signature to his great letter, " Elias, Sinner." But to many a man he had built a road of light.

Only with great difficulty, a few days before his death, which took place on April 23rd, 1253, he obtained absolution from the Archpresbyter of Cortona ; the question of his true penitence and submission was made the subject of a long and particular inquiry by the Pope. But he was buried in his fine new church in the old grey habit of his Order—a great organizer, a great builder, a great ruler, and the trusted friend of saints.

CHAPTER VI

The Subsequent Lives of the First Companions—Bernard—Rufino—Angelo—Masseo—Leo—Illuminato—Giles—His Cell at the Convent of Monte Ripido near Perugia—The Last Years of St. Clare.

I

OF the subsequent lives of the first companions after the death of St. Francis we have much and varied information, but not always worthy of trust. Legendary figures they soon became, about whom every tale had necessarily to bear the mark of some reputed characteristic. Such a one was Brother Juniper, the buffoon of the popular sermon, whose biography, attached to the " Fioretti," contains a number of humorous anecdotes some certainly untrue—such as that of revolting cruelty towards a pig—and others of such preternatural foolishness that they conflict with all that Thomas of Celano tells us of his fiery eloquence, his great power over demons, and the strong comfort he afforded to St. Clare upon her deathbed. Such stories were invented or purloined from the legend of an earlier saint, in order to afford that comic relief which a sermon preached to a mediæval crowd in a market-place demanded. But sober history has also much to tell.

Bernard, the first-born, the erstwhile Assisan dignitary, apparently was Guardian of the convent at the Portiuncula for about a decade after the Founder's death, but later retired for two years to a hut on Monte Sefro, possibly, as some aver, because he had quarrelled with Elias, but more probably to indulge his well-known love of solitude. Salimbene met him at Siena in 1241, a venerable figure, full of human kindness and wonderful stories of his saint. It is said of him that he would often fall into strong ecstasies, not only when at prayer, but sitting at table or on a journey. Giles used to say of him and his ecstasies, that " he fed flying, like the swallows." Being older than most of the Brothers when he joined the

Order, he was naturally one of the earliest to die. On his deathbed he imitated his Master and sending for a dish of cherries invited all the Brothers to share a last love-feast with him. "I was never a Brother Minor save in my temptations," was his saying.

Rufino, the refined, shy, melancholy mystic, whom Francis called one of the three holiest souls on earth—Rufino, with his strange strong visionary temptations, demons that came to try his faith and his great purity, only to be exorcized at Francis's word with terrific natural convulsions—Rufino retired after Francis's death into the life of solitary contemplation that he always had loved best. In 1247, when at the bidding of Crescentius the Brothers were ordered to collect the various personal records of their intimacy with the saint, together with Leo and Angelo, at the hermitage of Greccio, he helped in the composition of a "Legend of the Three Companions," which is possibly not the book which we know by that name. In 1271 Leo and he were together at the Portiuncula, when one night Bernard appeared to both and each thought that he had come to warn him of his death. But Rufino said, "Mine was the summons, Leo. For thou sawest him only in sleep, but I with my waking eyes. And Francis came for me also and said I was to go to God with the Brother whom thou sawest." Rufino was one of the few Brothers who examined the sacred stigmata during St. Francis's life.

Of Angelo, the gentle knight of Rieti, little is known, beyond that he forgathered with Leo and Rufino at Greccio and again with Leo and Juniper at the bedside of the dying Clare. He is said to have followed her about 1258. The burly, handsome Masseo probably survived him; indeed, according to Wadding, Masseo survived all the earliest companions, except Illuminato, but little is known to us of his later wanderings. He is said to have found the grace of Humility at last, which he had sought so diligently all his life, and having found it to have been so happy that he went about cooing with joy. Nor should this be taken as a sign of senility; for he was ever remembered for shrewd sayings.

Leo, the "Pecorello di Dio," Francis's secretary and confessor, has been dragged into most unseemly controversy by those who wish to use him as champion and chief authority in their attack upon the Conventual or "Relaxed" or Papal party. We have heard how it was said of him long after-

wards that he broke the Pope's marble vase, set up by Elias to collect alms for the building of the Papal monument to the saint. It has also been added with still less probability that, being scourged for this piece of very "unlamblike" insubordination, he went off to the Portiuncula and wrote the "Speculum Perfectionis" with its strong bias against the policy of his Minister-General, and thus got him turned out of office. This last is now admitted to be impossible, in view of the inexorable sequence of known dates; and its fall raises doubts about the former story, which surely no one but a partisan would desire to believe. Ugly stories about dead men are the great reproach of history; malice invents them, controversy exaggerates and they are written down as truth for future generations. The result of the attempt to use the authority of Leo in order to blacken the character of Elias has been to deprive him of the gentle charm that Francis loved in him. Undoubtedly, he had opportunities of knowing Francis such as no other man enjoyed; and surely, he treasured such memories in his heart. We know that he was a writer, that he probably took a principal part in preparing with Angelo and Rufino the "Legend of the Three Companions," and we have specimens of his exquisite handwriting in the two Breviaries that he made for St. Clare and St. Francis, as well as in that precious relic, the Blessing of St. Francis, chief of many witnesses to the reality of the stigmata. We are told moreover that he left certain rolls of writing to the care of the "Poor Ladies," and nothing is more likely than that these consisted of intimate personal records of his hero. But the suggestion that they were written with a party purpose is derogatory alike to them and to their author. If the "Legend of the Three Companions" be of his authorship he says nothing whatever therein that casts reflection on Elias, but on the other hand, in the last chapter he speaks with pride of the great church and with gratitude to the Pope for building it. If any of Leo's writings contained stories against Elias, it is strange that they were not published after the latter's fall and that the gossip Salimbene knew nothing of them. On the other hand, St. Clare was through all the friend both of Leo and Elias—which is in itself a proof that the differences between them were exaggerated and wickedly exploited by the partisans of succeeding generations.

Except for Illuminato and possibly Masseo, Leo was one

of the last of the companions to rejoin his Master, for he did not die till 1271. He, too, like all the other early Brothers, except Giles, was buried in the great Basilica, which indeed he compensated for any "marble vase" he may have broken by the legacy to it of his "keepsake," the Blessing of St. Francis.

Illuminato of Rieti, if there be not two of his name and birthplace, must have been a young man when he entered the Order in 1210, and yet he seems to have had a son named Henry, who afterwards inherited a castle, for on his death his father was given permission to dispose of it in the interest of the fief. Possibly, like Jacopone of Todi, he may have been turned to religion by the premature death of his wife and have left his child to be brought up by his family. At one time he was secretary to Elias, yet another link between the great Minister and the First Companions, for Illuminato was one of Francis's inner circle, his comrade on his daring mission to the Moslems, and a witness to the miracle of the stigmata; one of the five Brothers with him at La Verna and one of the four cited as references by the authors of the Legend of the Three Companions. In 1273 Fra Illuminato of Rieti became Bishop of Assisi, by which time he must have been over eighty years old, and over ninety when he died. But in a period wherein we have known two almost centenarian Popes in succession, Honorius and Gregory, the age of any prelate need not cause us wonder. On the other hand, the fact that one of the First Companions should die a Bishop is certainly of interest.

Giles we have left to the last because we have so many stories of him that it is hard to choose which to repeat. While Francis lived, he seems to have wandered widely, making long pilgrimages to distant shrines, and earning his scanty fare along the road by great variety of employment. He carried water, buried dead, gathered wood or walnuts; gleaned, harvested, trod grapes, threshed corn, baked bread, ground knives, cleaned pots and pans, washed platters or wove osier baskets; no simple labour came amiss to him. And when he neither prayed, nor worked, nor preached, he would take a little pipe from his sleeve and play tunes upon it. He liked to do service in return for his meat. One day he was invited to dine by the Cardinal Vasco di Rieti; he went early into the kitchen, sharpened all the knives and polished the pots of

the establishment, and then came cheerfully to table, bearing in triumph two little loaves, given him as recompense for his morning's work. He returned from his wanderings not long before Francis's death, and thenceforward gave himself up to a hermit's life of prayer and contemplation. Possibly he suffered for the change that had come over the Order; but the most natural explanation of his attitude towards it is not that of wrath or scorn for its official leaders, as some would have it, but of patient acquiescence, seeing that as it had grown too large to allow of the Brothers' wandering he must not be one to add to its confusion.

So he settled down in a small cell, close to an old church, on the summit of a hill outside Perugia, beyond the fourteenth-century gate and the circular sixth-century temple of S. Angelo, whence he enjoyed a view of the whole Spoletan Valley, of the beloved Portiuncula, and of his native Assisi. Afterwards on the spot was built the great Convent of Monte Ripido, but one can still see Giles's well in the garden hard by his dwelling, which has been made into a chapel. Of the well it is said that Giles struck the earth and told the Brothers to dig; on the following day the place was marked by an exquisite tuft of violets, and searching they found water of crystal purity at no great depth. Of the cell the principal relic was the hood of Giles and the stone which served him for pillow, but of late his bones have returned to it, buried under the altar. The whole place is sacred to him, as when he was alive.

Probably he disapproved of the great convent, but, had he felt bitterly, would he have placed his cell where he would always see it? He even came over to inspect it, which shows no ill-feeling; and having seen it all he is reported to have said: "Splendid, and so complete! All you want now is—wives!" There is too much sly good-humour in that remark for bitterness. There is no sufficient reason for saddling him, on the authority of a partisan book of a century later, with the guilt of having played a shabby part as instigator of the breaking of the bowl by Leo, believing the doer would be bitterly persecuted by Elias and yet daring him, the meekest of the Brethren, to do it! Several stories concerning Giles tradition may have to surrender to sober history; this one need cause no regret.

For the rest, his sardonic wit was proverbial. Once two

grand Cardinals came to see him and concluded the interview by asking for his prayers. "I pray for you? But you have surely far more hope than I! For you with your wealth and honour yet hope to be saved, while I, with all my poverty, dread lest I be damned!" To an enthusiastic young Brother, who boasted that he had had a vision of Hell, but had seen none of the Order there, he remarked, "Ah, but that was because you did not go low enough!"

One could well make an anthology out of his pithy sayings. This to the idler does not lack point: "Do you think that in doing nothing you are being spiritual?" Or his parable drawn from the cicala, which sings, not "La, la!" (There, there!) as men do, but "Ça, ça!" (Here, here!) "for it is here, not in another world, that we should strive to do well."

It is said that he was visited by Giacoma da Settisoli and by a Pope, probably Innocent IV, who stayed a long while in Perugia in 1252. He was certainly visited in 1261, the year before his death, by Minister-General Bonaventure, who travelled through Umbria to see all the convents and gather material for his "Legend of St. Francis." Giles asked the saintly Doctor if a poor ignorant fellow could be saved? The answer was, Of course, so long as he have the grace to love God. "But can a simple fool love God as much as a great scholar?" "Why, any old woman," answered St. Bonaventure, "can love God much better than a doctor of theology!" Giles, filled with joy and playful fun, hurried off to the garden gate and called out to the groups of people doubtless collected there to catch a glimpse of the learned Minister-General, "Hear, all you people! Any old woman, who can neither read nor write, can love God better than Brother Bonaventure!"

Would that the historians could have left to us the story of the coming of the King of France, St. Louis, who sought him out on the way to his crusade and went down on his knees before him, and Giles knelt down also and the two saints remained so embraced and finally arose and parted without a single word!

When beset with too many visitors in his cell at the Monte-Ripido, Giles hid himself away at the hermitage of Cetona, another exquisite spot with a glorious view, not far from Sarteano, to the south-west of the Lake of Chiusi. Giles held it to be one of the holiest places in the world. Towards the

end of his life his periods of ecstasy grew more frequent; signs and wonders multiplied about him. Lights gleamed above his head; lilies sprang up where he struck the earth, to witness to the perpetual virginity of Our Lady; at midnight, glories like the sun aureoled his cell. But when the end came, he was once more at Perugia and desirous of being buried in the great church beside his Master; but the city that had watched him would not let him go. A strong guard was set, lest, living or dead, he should be stolen away. "Tell the Perugians," he cried, "that their bells shall never ring because I am canonized, nor for any great miracle of mine!" "Canonized or not, we will have him!" was their answer, and they laid him in a sumptuous sarcophagus of the sixth century carved with the Madonna and the Twelve Apostles upon its sides and the story of Jonah and the Whale upon the lid, and bestowed it upon the Conventual Church of S. Francesco del Prato in their city. The miracles took place despite his warning.

Nevertheless, his bones were not allowed to rest in peace. In the course of centuries ruin overtook the church containing them, whereupon they were transported to the Chapel of St. Onofrio in the cathedral, and laid beside those of Conrad of Offida, stolen from Bastia. But lately the great sarcophagus has been appropriately buried in the Municipal Etrusco-Roman Museum, and the Giles's skull and innumerable bones can be seen in their new plate-glass and gilded casket under the altar of the chapel at Monte Ripido, made out of his cell. The whole place has thus become his fitting shrine, where, willingly or perforce, he might well perform his miracles for the pious pilgrim—and very likely does.

"Canonized or not," all these men were saintly mystics, living for choice in their little hermitages and, when occasionally in the world, certainly not of it. They were not men to rule a mighty Order. In the records of discussions in the Chapters-General, in the missions, the provincial hierarchies, the deputations to the Pope, not once does the name of any one of them appear.

But they have a literature of their own in the intimate Lives of St. Francis and above all in the "Fioretti." Moreover, they were Umbrians, chiefly Assisans, preferring doubtless their own charming dialect to the learned Latin of Paris, Oxford or Bologna. As to their attitude towards Elias, he

was one of themselves, native of one of their own villages ; and he had known Francis ; surely, in spite of differences, they were often proud of him, rejoicing in the ability with which he extended the Order and exalted the glory of their beloved saint and of their native city through the world. Surely, like Giles, they all sorrowed at his fall. As for those learned foreign doctors from Paris and Oxford, with their curious Latin accent, their pedantic reasoning and outlandish names, what did they know of Francesco, son of Pietro Bernardone? Literally nothing, except what *they* could tell! The doctors were learned in the Rule, and in the many ways wherein it might be observed. But they had not had the experience of observing it with him, of living the life with him, for, let us say, sixteen years. The tide of Francis's glory had swept around the world and left the First Companions in their hermitages, their backwaters, filled, not with strife and ardour, but with memory and peace.

II

Briefly we must now recount the last years of the Seraphic Mother, living ensepulchred at S. Damiano amid her fifty grey-clad ladies, a life of fastings and penances, visions and transports, converse with God and conflicts with the Devil. For two and forty years her food was chiefly crusts and water, a pallet of straw her bed, a piece of wood her pillow ; yet letters of hers are preserved addressed to Popes and Queens, full of wisdom and encouragement ; while miracles innumerable are told of her—healings of sick persons, brought to her little grating that she might make the sign of the cross upon them. For the rest, she spent the days of her infirmity in making corporals of fine needlework—fifty in all, we are told—while, being no longer able to walk in the convent garden, she lay on the little terrace shown us as hers to-day. The romantic story told in the " Fioretti " of her visit to St. Francis at the Portiuncula, of his discoursing so beautifully that the whole company fell into an ecstasy and a great light shone out from the little convent, so that the good folk of Assisi and Bettona thought that the buildings were burning and hurried down the hill to quench the fire—seems to be altogether apocryphal, in view of the positive statement in the Bull of Clare's canonization that she never left S. Damiano after the first time she entered it, and the omission in her biography

by Thomas of Celano of all mention of a miracle so picturesque. No written account of it appears until a century later, when the story, borrowed probably from the legend of St. Benedict and his sister St. Scholastica, was issued with intent to influence a controversy then raging between the Sons and Daughters of St. Francis.

Of her blessing of the loaves at the bidding of Pope Gregory and of the cross that appeared upon them, we have already told; but this is also a late story, drawn from the "Fioretti," or rather from the "Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Ejus," which is the Latin source of that delightful book. Her discomfiture of the Saracen bands of the Emperor Frederick, then encamped at Terni, by causing the Host, enclosed in Its Pyx, to be carried to the door of the convent, has better authority, for in September 1240 and again in 1246 Saracen bands were ravaging the territories of all the cities of the Papal party, and again in 1246, and the Assisans at the time believed their lands were saved by providential intervention at the intercession of St. Clare. The little door at which she showed herself is still to be seen in the façade of the convent. In those days it was approached by a ladder or drawbridge, removed in times of peril and at night. When the saint appeared at the open door the ruffians had already set up their scaling ladders against it.

But according to many of her modern biographers the "battle" of Clare's closing days was for the confirmation of her Rule, in contradistinction to the Rule that Pope Innocent IV had made for her. The latter in her opinion was not strict enough as regards Evangelical Poverty, and a little too strict perhaps as regards enclosure. The saint looked at the Rule subjectively, as what she desired to observe; the Pope regarded it objectively, as what was advisable and convenient for her observance from the point of view of the world. The poorer the Sisters, the greater the responsibility of the Brothers for supplying their needs; and now that there were hundreds of little communities scattered over Christendom, how could he tax the Order, as she wished, with the daily support of them all? From a practical point of view their heroic poverty was a nuisance; let each community have a farm, a mill, an orchard, a garden or a chapel with a tithe, and live as meagrely as it chose upon the produce thereof! According to Brother Stephen, reported by Salimbene, it was

none other than St. Francis himself who exclaimed, when he heard of the great growth of the Second Order, " The Lord in His mercy hath delivered us from Wives, and now the Devil hath procured us Sisters ! "

Poor John Parenti was worsted over the matter of Clare's chaplains ; for he had hoped to obtain exemption for the Brothers from this service by a Bull forbidding the friars to visit the Poor Ladies except by special licence. But the Seraphic Mother with characteristic determination suddenly dismissed all the lay Brothers, whose duty it was to beg for the support of her community, and thus procured a reversal of the order by what was literally a " hunger-strike " !

More and more difficult did it grow for the Brothers to procure by begging from the secular world, not only sufficient food for their own rapidly increasing numbers, but also enough to keep the Poor Ladies' ardent souls within their emaciated bodies. Pope after Pope—four in succession—implored, cajoled, commanded them to accept a little property, but their efforts were in vain. Elias seems to have been the only Minister during whose term of office this controversy was at rest ; for Clare and Elias from first to last understood each other. His solicitude for the communities of the Poor Ladies near Cortona drew down upon him the Papal wrath even after his excommunication ; his friendship with Clare continued to the end, and they died within a few weeks of one another. The Seraphic Mother was as staunch to her friends as to her ideals and principles.

But lacking Elias's guiding hand, the dispute between the Sons and Daughters of St. Francis reawakened ; the latter insisting on their dependence, the former striving to throw off responsibility, and the Popes, as ever, trying to compromise. Innocent IV drew up a Rule which each side deemed to concede too much, but finally after an interview with Clare in May 1253, he affixed his seal to the Rule of her own devising, on the condition that it should apply to her community of S. Damiano only. This precious parchment is still preserved in her convent in Assisi ; the dying saint received and kissed it only two days before her death.

But too much has been made of this dispute between a stricter or a larger expression of an ideal, in itself but a means to a spiritual goal, so little comprehended ! Poverty, Chastity, Obedience were the three keys to a Kingdom and only signifi-

cant in so far as they fitted the spiritual wards. The mediæval world insisted upon miracles and invented sayings of the saints for its political purposes ; the modern world desires romance and suggests one for Clare and Francis, or uses their stories to air its prejudice for or against the Pope ! But stay for an hour of silence in the sunlit garden of S. Damiano, or in the shadows of the chapel, and you will surely realize how subordinate for these holy souls were such " battles " and disputes to their mighty contests, mystic victories and supreme rewards, won on the frontiers of Paradise.

ST. CLARE, BY CIMABUE

(Church of St. Clare, Assisi)

CHAPTER VII

Innocent IV and the Changes in the Upper Church—The Growth of Assisi in the Thirteenth Century—Convents in Other Cities—The Religious Movements and the Confraternities and "Laude."

I

EARLY in the year 1251, the Emperor Frederick being dead, Pope Innocent IV began his slow, cautious, but triumphant journey back to his dominions. He rested at Vienne, Orange, Marseilles, Genoa, Milan, Brescia, Mantua, Ferrara, Modena, Faenza, among other cities, and so reached his salubrious palace at Perugia, where he abode for eighteen months. His capital was in the hands of the populace, led by a certain Bolognese lawyer, Brancaleone, chosen Senator, a man not given to reverent address. Leaving Perugia at the end of April 1253, the Pope stayed for nearly six months at his papal palace of Assisi, that is, until the beginning of October. During this sojourn he consecrated the Upper Church of S. Francesco, the Cathedral of S. Rufino and the two churches of S. Pietro and S. Paolo. He also had the famous interview with St. Clare.

These facts are important from the point of view of the architecture of S. Francesco, since they clearly mark the beginning, and set forth the reason, of the strong French influence on the building. On July 10, 1253, six weeks after the consecration, went forth a Papal Bull ordering provision to be made for the completion and adornment of the Basilica, "*nobili compleri structura et insignis praeeminentia operis decorari.*" The new Bishop of Assisi, Niccolò da Calvi, a Franciscan, the Pope's chaplain and biographer, doubtless encouraged him; for the Cathedral Chapter had opposed his election as Bishop, preferring the Minister-General, Crescentius; but the Pope had forced him, Niccolò, upon them, wherefore the latter was particularly anxious to induce the Pope to continue the adornment of the church, in order to

win favour with the populace of Assisi. The Pontiff and his Court had just returned from provinces where many churches were already built or building in the new " French " or pointed style, whence architects were easily found able to insert under the round arches and wooden roof of Elias's building the fashionable clustered pillars, with ogival vaults resting upon them, and in the wide lancets traceried windows. External flying buttresses were added to withstand the additional thrust ; and other structural changes possibly made in the Lower Church at the same time, for example, the addition of the barrel vaults of the transepts. A host of highly-skilled, French-influenced stone-cutters—probably Comacine from Northern Italy—lavished their exquisite art on the great double doorway of the upper façade, the rose-window above it, the delicate carvings of the new capitals of the Upper Church ; while in other works, such as the high altar in the Lower Sanctuary, the influence of the French style vied and blended with that of the Cosmatesque mosaic inlayers of Rome. A point to be noted is that all this " un-Franciscan " luxury of ornament, far from being executed under the regime of Elias, was initiated during the generalate of the strong hope of the Zealots, that is, the Blessed John of Parma. Doubtless the Minister-General took no part, neither made any protest; for the Basilica, like the Convent-Palace, was not the Order's, but the Pope's, who could do as he wished with his own.

But during the Pope's residence in his Assisi palace occurred another event of critical importance in the history of the Order, wherein the Minister-General must have been concerned. By the death of St. Clare on the twelfth of August 1253 the same situation was created for Innocent IV and John of Parma as for Gregory IX and Elias by the death of St. Francis. Their solution was at all points the same. A strong guard of brothers and municipal men-at-arms was immediately sent to surround S. Damiano, the sacred body was conveyed with magnificent pomp, the Pope himself attending, to the same small Church of S. Giorgio just outside the walls ; preliminaries for the canonization were pushed forward rapidly and the ceremony was held within little more than two years ; funds were collected throughout Christendom, still ringing with her miracles, and a large church and convent were speedily erected as a fitting monument to the Seraphic

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Mother, the second Champion of Holy Poverty. When this work was undertaken, the affairs of the Order were in the hands of the Blessed John of Parma; and in those of St. Bonaventure, when it was completed.

If the convent of St. Clare be smaller than the convent of St. Francis, that is because it contains no papal palace; if to-day the church be less glorious within, we owe it partly to a certain German Bishop Spader, who in the seventeenth century deliberately destroyed the frescoes, lest the nuns should be distracted from their office by the number of visitors that came to see them! For the rest, the history of the two Basilicas is singularly alike.

St. Clare during her lifetime, like St. Francis, had gathered around her a special band of followers—including her mother, Sister Ortolana, her sister, Saint Agnes, Abbess of Monticelli in Florence, the Blessed Balvina, Abbess of Vallegloria, the Blessed Benedetta, the second Abbess of S. Damiano, the Blessed Filippa of Assisi, the Blessed Cecilia of Spello, the Blessed Francesca of Col di Mezzo, and many others of holy life, if not canonically beatified. At the time of the Seraphic Mother's death there were some fifty Sisters in her little convent. Deprived of her encouraging and protecting presence, they dared no longer to remain in a situation so exposed and isolated, wherefore, gathering together their most precious relics—the Crucifix that had spoken to St. Francis, the grating of the window, at which his wounds had been seen and kissed during the transporting of his body to Assisi, the ivory and silver Pyx, in which St. Clare had caused to be carried the Host when she confronted the Saracens, and other sacred vessels of their altar—they followed her hastily into the shelter of the city, even before the new convent was prepared. In this flight from their beloved home they only followed the example of their Benedictine sisters, all of whom about this time abandoned their undefended houses at S. Paolo of Bastia, St. Agnese, S. Angelo di Panso, S. Apollinare, S. Donato and elsewhere, in order to seek protection from the marauding bands, of Germans and Saracens in particular, who by their barbarities were still spreading terror through the countryside.

Not willingly or with alacrity did the Canons of S. Rufino give the site for the new church and convent, that is the Church and Hospital of S. Giorgio; but none the less the fund was raised, the church erected and by 1260 completed, when with

great pomp, in the presence of Minister-General Bonaventure, the body of the Seraphic Mother, together with those of Ortolana and her sisters, was reburied in a subterranean chamber under the high altar. The building may have been designed by Fra Filippo da Campello ; surely it was modelled upon the Upper Church of S. Francesco, as Elias left it, with a wooden roof resting on simple arches. The vault over the sanctuary may date also from this time ; but those over the nave were put in later, like those of the Upper Church of S. Francesco, albeit in this case not for many years. One proof of this change lies in the slender semi-cylindrical buttresses, sufficient to bear the thrust of a single arch, but not when weighted by vaults of stone. When the vaults were put in, great flying buttresses became necessary, precisely as in the case of S. Francesco. The system of vaulting the sanctuary or the chief chapel only was very common in Franciscan churches, as witness those of Perugia, Terni, Montefalco, Cortona and many others, including the great Church of Santa Croce at Florence. It was approved by the General Chapter of Narbonne in 1260. The Cathedral of S. Rufino until the sixteenth century was roofed in a similar way.

Thus it was gradually, not of original intention, that the beauty of these churches grew with ever new adornments. Restoration and enrichment extended and ennobled the great Convent of S. Francesco, of which little except the splendid site carries us back to Elias. It was probably during the Minister-Generalate of Girolamo d'Ascoli that the new developments took place, and still more when in 1288 this strong Conventual was raised to the Papacy as Nicholas IV. He ordered that alms should be once more collected for the embellishment of the Basilica, on which followed especially the decoration of the Upper Church. In the first years of the fourteenth century began the building of side-chapels by rich persons who desired to be buried near the saint.

It is strange indeed to watch the growth of Beauty. Scatter her seeds in the barest places and they blossom and sow themselves over and over again. Well might the Chapter of Narbonne ordain in 1260 under St. Bonaventure that, while it was no trespass against Holy Poverty to have a painted window in a central chapel or a vault of stone over a chief altar, yet to exceed that limit would not become her followers. Rapidly over vault and arch the glory spread inevitably, as

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one tall window caught its glowing radiance from another and sculptured foliage climbed or leaped, like foxgloves on a wall! The coloured sunbeams painted stones that were still bare of pictures, until Elias's solemn fane was robed as a royal sanctuary and the shrine of Poverty became a treasure-house of Art. Why make it a reproach to Elias or his successors? The desire for Beauty is as natural as the desire for God.

II

Meanwhile all through the thirteenth century the city of Assisi was growing very rapidly in wealth and extent, as well as in renown. The advent of innumerable pilgrims, the sojourn of Courts, the great Chapters of Friars, brought her new trade and increase of population; the building and rebuilding of churches was prodigious. We have seen how Innocent IV in the summer of 1253 consecrated or reconsecrated, besides S. Francesco, the Cathedral of S. Rufino and the churches of S. Pietro and S. Paolo. In the days of St. Francis almost the only building near the city and between it and the Lower Hill was the ancient hospital, of which the chapel, remodelled and repainted, is known to-day as the Chapel of the Pilgrims. This little oratory is not orientated squarely to the street, since it dates from the twelfth century, whereas it was not until after St. Francis's day that the road leading down towards his sanctuary was made.

So fast did the houses spread that already in 1246 a municipal decree was necessary forbidding erection of buildings beyond the present line of the Upper Piazza of S. Francesco. Ogival arches in rose-coloured Subasian stone, lately released from stucco and whitewash, convey a faint idea of the beauty of the buildings of this period, while, especially in the old town, a few surviving palace-towers speak of the ancient feudal families, whose feuds and most destructive warfares were the curse of the two or three succeeding centuries. Thence forward chronicles are full of the wars and sieges, spoilings, massacres and burnings, especially due to the enmity of the Perugians, who time after time besieged, captured, and burnt Assisi, on one occasion—in 1441, under Niccolò Piccinino—even selling her captive population into slavery and conspiring to raze the city to the ground. In fact, one may say that this, the thirteenth century of Papal domination, was almost

the only period before the sixteenth wherein Assisi knew any long spell of peace.

Thus during the first quarter of the fourteenth century a new and much wider circuit of walls was built, in anticipation of still further increase of population and prosperity, which her feuds and the jealousy of her more powerful neighbour never permitted her to attain. Hence comes it that her population has always dwelt like an impoverished family in a house too large for its diminished numbers; hence her peculiar spaciousness and wealth of gardens, often planted upon land formerly covered with buildings; hence many a green lane bordered by walls with Gothic doors and windows and beyond them olive-groves and vineyards scattered over with ruins, in vesture of ivy, briar and clematis.

Besides the Church of Sta. Chiara at Assisi a great many other Franciscan churches all over Central Italy were erected about this time upon the model of the Upper Church of S. Francesco. Their history was almost invariably the same. Sites for small "places" for the Brothers Minor were given to St. Francis by the authorities of every city, generally just outside the city walls. S. Francesco del Prato at Perugia, St. Elia at Spoleto, the house of Spadalunga at Gubbio, and Sta. Croce at Florence are some of the more obvious instances of this rule. After the death and canonization of the saint, small churches, built upon such sites, were dedicated to him, which with the almost universal expansion of the cities in the thirteenth century, found themselves in the centre of busy suburbs and before long within the circuit of the walls. These primitive chapels were soon manifestly insufficient to hold the great congregations which the growing popularity of the friars as preachers more and more attracted, not to speak of the growing numbers of priests in every convent. Therefore they soon were replaced by larger though still simple structures, especially adapted for sermons—aisleless, wooden-roofed, according to the Narbonne constitution of 1260, with hexagonal apse and ogival vault of stone over the chief altar, severe lancets in the nave and often a plain wheel-window to the west. This became the pattern of most Umbrian Franciscan churches—Spello, Foligno, Montefalco, Terni, Gualdo, Nocera, Perugia, Cortona, Siena, Volterra, Prato, Pistoia and many others prove the rule, albeit with individual peculiarities. These were all built before 1270. In only a few—that is, south of the

Apennines—such as, for instance, the church at Gubbio, designed by Fra Bevignate, was a more elaborate plan adopted ; though many built on the simpler model were subsequently modified. Gradually these churches grew to be the cemeteries of noble families, who erected chapels round and commissioned a famous artist to decorate them with the legend of some patron saint until, like St. Simone at Spoleto, they became for the nobles their local Sta. Croce.

It was probably upon this almost universal pattern that the large Gothic church at the Portiuncula was built, covering the little shrine and the infirmary in which the saint is reputed to have died. In its primitive form this great Gothic church was probably completed by the end of the third quarter of the century, when discussion arose as to the canonical validity of the Indulgence granted to the Portiuncula by Honorius III. In 1288 Nicholas IV, the Franciscan Pope, promoted by Indulgences its enlargement and adornment ; early in the following century we hear of a gallery or loggia over the porch—" a marvellous work," according to the chronicler. The original convent at the Portiuncula, extended constantly, and notably by St. Bonaventure and by Nicholas IV, must already by the fourteenth century have been almost as large, save for the papal palace, as the Sacro Convento on the hill. Later, this Portiuncula church was adorned by notable frescoes of the great Perugian School. Although most of the old buildings were swept away to make room for Vignola's enormous edifice and the present convent, which dates from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet even to-day in the neighbourhood of the Chapel of the Roses, built over St. Francis's cell by St. Bonaventure, enlarged by S. Bernardino, and frescoed by Tibero d' Assisi, the visitor may wander through a vast labyrinth of courts, dormitories and refectories, half-ruinous and abandoned, but dating from the early fourteenth century.

Similar was the history of the hermitages. It was Innocent IV who enlarged the Chapel of St. Mary of the Angels at Alvernia, though the great church there was not started until 1348 nor finished until the end of the fifteenth century. At the Carceri the Blessed Paolo Trinci constructed a dormitory of eight cells in the middle of the thirteen-hundreds ; S. Bernardino another, besides a well, a chapel and much else. Many of the little hermitages, notably Monteluco and Monte

Ripido, owe their present form to the extensions of the Franciscan Saint of Siena, as those convents within the towns to the Saint of Bagnorea. But in all cases the growth seems to have been gradual, as local circumstances demanded, due to the external pressure of the pious laity upon the Order, rather than the ambition for expansion from within.

III

Briefly now we must glance at the religious life of the populace of Italy, in which the preaching of the Mendicants was working as a leaven. All through the century waves of religious feeling swept across the Peninsula, in movements resembling spontaneous revivals, which, lacking official guidance, sometimes became anti-clerical and occasionally heretical, especially if they originated under influence from abroad.

We have watched the strong revivals caused by St. Francis's preaching, the miracles and conversions, the reconciliation of families at feud. In 1233 came "the Year of Alleluias," said to be started in the north by a Dominican, Giovanni da Vicenza. Salimbene says, "It was a time of jubilee, of joy and praise and merry-making, because the wars were over. Knights and foot-soldiers, burghers and rustics, young men and maidens, old men and children came together to sing hymns; and such devotion there was in all the cities of Italy. Each quarter of the town would have its banner in the procession and on it painted its patron martyr saint. All the country-folk thronged in from the villages to the city, carrying flags, branches of trees, or lighted candles. There was preaching from temporary pulpits set up in the squares, morning, noon and night; nor could the people cease from praise, so inebriate were they with love divine. There was no wrath among them, nor disquiet, nor rancour; but everything was peaceful; I saw it with my eyes!" A certain man called Benedetto from Spoleto, in a long black robe, marked with a red cross before and behind, seems to have been the leader in Parma. He sounded a trumpet and cried, "Glory be to the Father!" and so on, and a chorus of boys that followed him led the people, crying, "Alleluia!" like an antiphon. It was from this feature that the revival got its name.

Five-and-twenty years later we have another very different picture. It was the hour of the "Flagellants." An old Franciscan, Rainero Fasani, emerged from a cave somewhere

in Umbria and, entering the cities, preached repentance, with prophecies of the imminent Judgment Day. As he passed down the street he scourged himself and the thousands that soon followed him imitated his acts. All ranks and ages were possessed with a frenzy of repentance—grave nobles, merchants, delicate women, even little children, stripped themselves to the waist and, covering their faces, walked two and two in slow procession, scourging themselves and wailing doleful penitential hymns. They wandered from city to city, spreading the infection of madness, as ever new crowds joined their fainting ranks. By night they went with tapers and torches borne before them, startling with dismal cries the sleeping towns and lonely castles. Each penitent followed for a full month and three days, in remembrance of the three and thirty years that Christ dwelt upon earth. Winter and summer for years the penance continued without interruption and finally died out at last through the intervention of authority and the general derision of the crowd.

About 1272 the movement reawakened at the cry of a young illiterate girl, fabled to possess the gift of prophecy, who went about announcing terrible disasters to those who were remiss in their religious observance. Before the end of the century came the Fraticelli, often heretical, springing partly from the "Spiritual" or strict Franciscans. These tides of feeling came and passed, occasionally bringing death and disaster to their leaders, when they came into conflict with authority; at other times leaving monuments of singular loveliness, expressing the artistic sensibility of the age.

Among such monuments are the Confraternities, religious guilds of laymen, generally Franciscan Tertiaries—whose brethren in their bright-coloured capes and rough brown cassocks may be seen carrying their gilded crucifixes and painted banners in funeral or other religious processions and whose ancient and often beautifully frescoed chapels give charm to many a quiet street. In Assisi those Confraternities which have no chapel of their own, from time to time are gathered for corporate worship in the old Benedictine parish Church of S. Pietro, with its austerely whitewashed walls, round barrel roof and heavy piers and arches; or in that of Sta. Maria delle Rose, in the upper part of the town, or in S. Paolo or another. But the richer Confraternity of the Stigmata in the Via Garibaldi has a chapel finely frescoed both

within and without, while that of S. Rufinuccio can boast a Crucifixion by the hand of Giotto or his school. The Guild of the Shoemakers, founded in the fourteenth century, owns the Chapel of S. Crispino, while early in the fifteenth the Brotherhood of St. Anthony-the-Abbot acquired the chapel of the old hospital in the Via Superba and caused it to be so exquisitely decorated by Matteo da Gualdo and Pier Antonio da Foligno, with the quaint legends of their patron and of St. James of Compostella, that it is now one of the loveliest places in the town. It is known to-day as "the Chapel of the Pilgrims."

Moreover, this century of faith and heresy was as a natural springtime filled with infinite religious song. The hymns and chants that the people sang in their varied and still mainly unwritten dialects were known as "Laude"; every town, in Umbria at least, had many, the work of anonymous poets, strong, sweet and intensely human, "dropping with blood and tears." In Cortona, Perugia, Pesaro survive especially beautiful "laude"; others, incorporated in peasant hymns, belong to the whole land. To-day every valley, every district, almost every household through the countryside has its store of hymns and litanies, which it uses by immemorial tradition at the fitting seasons. It has its love-poems, too, its serenades, and its gay rhymes and proverbs, embodying the old conceits, the immemorial jests. Over the corn it chants its ancient incantations, its rhythmic prayer for blessings on the harvest; as the family sits by the threshing-floor, all night it chants and sings. It is always hard to wring from a peasant the words that he knows quite well; but sheaves of such verses have been gleaned by students and are full of simple charm. The store of folk-poetry in Umbria is still utterly inexhaustible, in spite of all that the schools and the cinematograph can do. To understand it needs a knowledge of each local dialect, to translate it is as impossible as to render the glamour of a Scottish ballad in the speech of Italy. Many of the secular songs even hark back to Pagan days, with some long-forgotten reference to a long-dead divinity; others carry rhymes and phrases from these far-off revivals, or haply an echo of some verse of Jacopone da Todi.

GUBBIO : A STREET

CHAPTER VIII

Two great Minister-Generals—John of Parma and St. Bonaventure.

I

AS we emerge into the second generation of the Sons of Francis one of the first great figures we encounter is that of the Blessed John of Parma. Born about the year 1208, of poor extraction—son of a bird-fowler, Salimbene says—he was brought up in the hospice of S. Lazaro in his native city and by reason of his application and his aptitude for study was presently sent to Paris University. He entered the Franciscan Order in 1233, at the age of twenty-five, and was thenceforward principally employed as a teacher of theology at Parma, Naples and Bologna. Salimbene tells us that he was of moderate height and beautiful in all his members, well-knit and strong to endure without fatigue all manner of physical and mental labour. His face was the face of an angel, full of grace and joy. Large-hearted, large-minded, long-suffering; courteous, compassionate, and devout; much given to prayer, and so eloquent a preacher that those who heard him generally wept. His life was a mirror and an example; exceedingly learned, a master of logic, a great theologian, an excellent writer, a musician and a pleasant singer, "altogether a man most acceptable to God and to his fellow-men."

In 1245 Crescentius sent him as his deputy to the Council of Lyons, and two years later at a Chapter-General held at Avignon he was unanimously elected Minister-General of the Order. He was above all else a man of indomitable energy. That he can hardly be claimed as a Zealot for the Rule is clearly shown by his acceptance in 1252 of the great Benedictine Church and Convent of the Ara Cœli as the chief house of the Order in Rome, as also by the undoubted fact that he was ever an upholder of the Schools. But he spent the first years of his ministry in travelling into every province and visiting every convent, giving everywhere edifying examples of humility and contempt for the superfluities of life. Eccleston says that

in 1247 he attended a Chapter at Oxford ; it seems that he was particularly edified by the state of the English province. On his way John visited France, Burgundy, Germany and probably Spain, besides all the houses in Italy, and finally, with the permission and encouragement of Pope Innocent, he went on a mission to Greece to strive to reconcile the Eastern and Western Churches. He was received by Vatatius the Emperor and Manuel the Patriarch with the greatest reverence and, had not both the Pope and Emperor died soon afterwards, possibly something might have come of it.

But the Minister-Generalship was ever becoming a more and more difficult post. For now that St. Francis had been dead some twenty years, the dangers foreshadowed in his testament were daily increasing, especially with regard to the relations of the Order with the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and the secular priests. The saintly Founder had earnestly insisted upon due reverence for the Church, the Bishops, the parish authorities, and the official theologians, and upon reluctance to seek privileges that would awaken jealousy, and above all upon strict obedience towards Ministers and Guardians, for the avoidance of heresy and the maintenance of discipline. All the chief clauses in his Will are directly concerned with these things. Crescentius' efforts had been particularly directed at endeavouring to control the extreme " spiritual " men, as the Zealots began to be called, who, as he writes,

" in their temerity, like young asses' colts, have presumed to kick off the burden of Obedience and refuse to dwell in the convents of the Order, but wander about the world at will, preaching and teaching and hearing confessions without authority, for the ruin of their own souls and the scandal of not a few."

And now his successor, for all his eloquence, his learning and his sanctity, was destined to fall after ten years of office, a victim to another great temptation of the Order. To explain how this arose we must hark back a little.

The Theological Schools of the Mendicant Orders had attracted so many men of intellect and talent, that everywhere their sermons and lectures were thronged, to the emptying of the parish churches and the secular colleges. Privileges beyond count had been sought and obtained, abroad even more than in Italy, especially in the days of Elias's immediate successors. In Paris the Mendicants were almost at war with the clergy

and the lay university professors, and so much pressure had the latter contrived to bring to bear upon the Curia that finally Pope Innocent IV had been prevailed on to annul all the said privileges in one Bull and to subject the Orders to episcopal ruling, just as their Founders had wished. But this Bull had been one of the last acts of Innocent, who died within a month, whereupon the Friars Preachers openly boasted that they had prayed for this eventuality, so that the proverbial saying went the round of the universities, " From the litanies of the Dominicans, good Lord, deliver us ! " To Innocent succeeded Alexander, whose first act was to revoke his predecessor's Bull and to restore the privileges of the Mendicants ; whereupon the seculars in turn were forced to patience, and to watching for the stumbling of their opponents.

Now John of Parma, like Aymon of Faversham, was a doctor of theology and had fought for the privileges of the Order he directed, as though he had never heard of " Sancta Simplicitas," or Francis's distrust of Schools. Moreover, as a mystic given to speculation, he had gathered around him a circle of learned visionaries, whose dreams were more daring than orthodox. Their principal study were the works of the Joachim, saintly Abbot of Flores, whose strange career and stranger thoughts must detain us for a moment.

Born at Colico, near Cosenza, about the year 1132, Joachim had been brought up as a soldier and had followed a Norman count to the East to seek adventure and fortune. Converted to religious life by the sight of a pestilence at Constantinople, he had retired into solitary meditation, and, passing the Lenten fast alone upon the summit of Mount Tabor, had been rewarded upon Easter night by a revelation as to the inner meaning of the Scriptures. He had returned to Italy as a wandering preacher, entered a Cistercian house and set himself to study. He had founded a new and stricter branch of his Order at Flores in Calabria, had been favoured by Popes, visited by Kings, notably Richard of England, had been appointed confessor to the Empress Constance, and had died in the year 1202, a mysterious and venerated personage with a reputation for prophetic gifts, which he had ever denied. If his books were known at all, it was to very few, and few had found heresy in them.

But it seems that in 1240 the Abbot of his convent, fearing it might be pillaged by the Saracens of Frederick, carried these

books away and entrusted them for safe keeping to the Franciscan convent at Pisa. Here they were studied with enthusiastic zeal, their prophecies, no doubt, being brought up to date. They were found to consist of three main books, "A Concordance of the New and the Old Testament," "Explanation of the Apocalypse," and "The Psalter of Ten Strings," their principal idea being of the three states or ages, the first of the Father, lasting from the Creation to the Incarnation; the second of the Son, enlightened by the revelation of the New Testament and the teaching of the Church; the third of the Holy Spirit, an era yet to come, wherein love and peace and perfect liberty should reign. The first revelation came through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with his twelve sons; the second through Zacharias, John the Baptist, and Christ with His twelve Apostles; and now the third period was heralded, in the opinion of the fervent friars, by Joachim, Dominic and Francis with his first twelve companions. That John of Parma was interested in the books we know from Salimbene, who tells us that he copied them out for him. His enemies maintained that he had written a treatise on them.

The message they contained was known to the world under the title of "The Everlasting Gospel," although a book called by that name probably never was written. But a certain intimate friend of John of Parma, Brother Gherardino of Borgo S. Donnino, published a volume that he called "An Introduction to the Everlasting Gospel," which read into the ideas of Joachim interpretations that were decidedly subversive. For he maintained, what Joachim himself had never claimed, that the Holy Spirit had inspired these books, which were in fact the Everlasting Gospel; that about the time they were inspired, that is the year 1200, the Spirit of Revelation departed from the Scriptures, that the Angel of the new Gospel was the Seraph Francis, that Antichrist had already come and was, not the late Frederick II, as some had imagined, but Alphonso of Castile, still in the flesh; that the true interpretation of the new Gospel rested with the Franciscan Order and that at the end of the year 1260 (which number was obtained by intricate mystic calculations) the Holy Ghost would descend from Heaven to inaugurate the new age, the reign of liberty and light, wherein there would be no need of sacraments and Popes and prelates would be done away!

This foolish book was put on sale in Paris in the autumn

of 1254 at the height of the controversy over the cancelled privileges, and was naturally seized upon by the secular clergy and the University of Paris in order to attack this new subversive Order that was overturning society and incidentally emptying their own churches and lecture-halls.

Fortunately for the Franciscans their opponents overreached themselves, and in their list of the errors of the book, denounced by the Bishop of Paris on the authority of William of St. Amour, were many it never contained, so that the accusers were the first to be reprimanded. But Gherardino also was suspended and deprived of his professorship, and his friend and protector, John of Parma, at a Chapter held at Ara Cœli, was accused of heresy, and forced to resign his Generalship. Asked by the popular voice to name his successor, he chose Bonaventure of Bagnorea, the third great Minister of the Order.

No moment in the whole history of the Church is more important than this, and no place could be more fitting for the scene. At the head of its broad stairway of a hundred steps the Venerable Basilica of the Ara Cœli crowns the Eastern promontory of the Roman Capitol, dominating a mighty sea of ruined pagan temples. In the thirteenth century it stood like a banner of peace and mercy reared up between the contending towers of barbarian nobles—the Frangipani on the Palatine and the Savelli in the Theatre of Metullus. A century later its spacious nave rang with the eloquence of Cola di Rienzo, and this time its many columns heard the voices of these saintly friars—John of Parma, and St. Bonaventure seeking the road whereby the great Order should advance. Was it now to turn back, as the Zealots wished, into the dreary mediæval wastes of mystical ascetism and fruitless speculation or to go forward on the catholic road of human education and development? By the election of Bonaventure the momentous question was most providentially resolved.

But the extreme men who had caused all the trouble would not submit to the Pope's judgment, and three years later Gherardino and his chief companion Leonard were tried for heresy and condemned to perpetual imprisonment. Then John of Parma was attacked in turn and put on his trial at Città della Pieve.

Città della Pieve is not very important as a shrine of Franciscan Italy; it is uncertain whether the old and aban-

doned convent, close to the city gate, was founded by St. Francis or a follower. But it was most probably in the chapel of this building that the famous trial took place. The little city has other claims than this to be visited; it was the birthplace of Perugino and various characteristic works of his are here. It has also a quiet charm of its own and a fine view over the valley that leads down past Orvieto towards Rome. But the record of this trial is its chief Franciscan memory, and it illustrates, not as some think, the tragedy of the Order, but the strange and dangerous mazes, wherein holy minds may stray. It seems that at one moment John of Parma was in danger of a sentence like that of Gherardino, but for a strongly-worded letter from the powerful Cardinal Ottoboni, informing the judges that if any penalty were imposed on this holy and learned man, he would resent it, as if imposed upon himself.

So John was told to choose his own place of retreat, and he chose Greccio in the Rieti Valley, the Franciscan Bethlehem, one of the holiest and loveliest shrines in Italy, and there he dwelt with Joachim, Merlin, the Prophets and the Sybils for two and thirty years.

Thirty years he abode in a tiny cave in the steep woodland overhanging the deep ravine and the broad Reatan plain, sleeping upon the hard worn earth amid the squalor of Nature's too intrusive intimacy, the flies and insects in the heat, the mire or icy constriction of the winter, after a life of untiring activity and constant travel amid courts and conferences and crowded schools and convents, regulated by his work. Yet Brother John was no wild half-witted penitent, expiating some imaginary sin by solitary self-tortures. The world did not forget him, nor did he forget the world.

To his lonely little cell came Cardinals and scholars and especially Brothers of the strict observance, "Spirituals," like Conrad of Offida and Ubertino of Casale. More than one Pontiff wished to make him a Cardinal; but having tasted power and glory, henceforth he refused all honour, preferring his meditations, occupied by the writing of books—such as the "De Beneficiis Creatoris," the "De Civitate Christi," and possibly the famous "Sacrum Commercium Beati Francisci cum Domina Paupertate,"—diverted by the love and familiarity of the Creatures—such as the two great birds which nested under the table in his cell—and illumined from time to time by some celestial manifestation—such as the visit of

the angel that served his Mass one morning when his acolyte overslept himself.

Then at the last, albeit weighted by over fourscore years, he was fired once more with his old dream of reconciling the Eastern and Western Churches, and having obtained the permission of Nicholas IV, started on his long and perilous journey. He visited all the shrines of Umbria and, turning eastward, arrived at the little city of Camerino, when the load of his years, privations and fatigues closed on him, and in May 1289 he died.

The men of Camerino made him a fine tomb, at which numberless miracles took place. But not till after nigh upon five centuries was his popular beatification canonically confirmed—in an age which had little to fear from his Eastern mysticism, for it had forgotten Joachim and Merlin. But whatever the perilous entanglements into which his mind was led by love of strange intricacies, the memory of this vigorous and learned seer, with his sweet voice and his "heavenly" face so full of joy and graciousness, with the great birds nesting beneath his table, and the angels hasting to his altar, is a Franciscan picture which no man will forget.

II

When John of Parma was asked at the Chapter of the Order held at the Ara Cœli to name his successor, he chose Brother Bonaventure of Bagnorea, and surely he chose well. Giovanni de Fidanza was born in 1221 of well-to-do, if not noble, family, in that picturesque, high-set little mountain town some twelve miles to the south of Orvieto on the borders of Umbria and Latium. In infancy his life was despaired of at a moment when St. Francis was preaching in Bagnorea, so his mother laid the child at the saint's feet, who seeing him exclaimed with prophetic gladness, "O buona ventura!" which is to say, "Good luck!" Wherefore the mother on the child's recovery dedicated him to God by the name of Bonaventure; and fortunate was he indeed and of good luck to men! Fortunate was he, above all, in his mother, Maria dei Ritelli; for she brought him up in the knowledge of God and the sense of dedication, which doubtless so inspired and stimulated his development that by the age of twenty-two, when he took the habit, and went to Paris to complete his studies, he was already, not only tall of stature and beautiful to look upon, but exquisite in

life, in mind, in virtue. Fortunate was he also in the hour of his coming to Paris, an hour of crisis for the Order, when such a man as he was sorely needed; yet in time to study under Alexander of Hales, who taught there until his death in 1246. "I do not know," says Gerson, the great Chancellor of the University, "if Paris has ever produced a doctor equal to Bonaventure." He was a mystic, rather than philosopher, his most popular work being his "Itinerary of the Soul to God." For him the object of the world was constant Revelation, and of man the illumination of his intellect and the perfecting of the soul for union with the Divine.

His ideal of the Franciscan mission is surely one acceptable alike to Francis and to the modern world. In his opinion, the Bishops were so preoccupied with the practical administration of their sees, and the priests with the innumerable cares and businesses of their overcrowded parishes, that God, in His Providence, and the Pope in his wisdom, had called the Order to assist the world in its spiritual needs. Of the Franciscans, some were occupied in study, to fit themselves for preaching and instructing others; some with the service of the altar; some with nursing; some with the visiting and instruction of the ignorant; some with the collecting of alms for the maintenance of the community; while those, who had learned trades, worked for the benefit of the brethren and of strangers; others, when so directed, travelled upon missions—no one being allowed to be idle, except the sick. As for the faults of the few, they were only too obvious; "for that which is evil floats on the surface, while true holiness is a hidden thing to be found only by certain signs."

It is a great mistake to draw a contrast between the outlook of John of Parma and of St. Bonaventure without recalling their far deeper resemblance. If the acceptance for the Order of the Convent of the Ara Cœli—with surely the largest church belonging to the Order at this time—were not in itself sufficient proof that the former was no rigid "Spiritual," the circular letter addressed to the Provincials on his succession by the latter is surely enough to show that Bonaventure was not of the "Relaxed." For in it he denounces in no measured terms the vices that were bringing the Order in disrepute, among them including the desire for gold, for costly and sumptuous buildings, and the means of acquiring such unneeded riches, that is, by the drawing up of wills and hovering round death-beds and

by the greed of the itinerant men. He is certainly with St. Francis when he especially rebukes the violence of those who preached against the seculars, thus stirring up strife and hatred, where should be mutual reverence and co-operation.

His advantage over John of Parma is that his mind was more Catholic, that is to say, more human; less interested in the curious, the intricate, the eccentric; more steadfast in loyalty to that august tradition which for twelve centuries had embodied the true Principle of Faith. He has often been blamed for permitting the prosecution of his predecessor; but he realized the great danger threatening the Order under the government of one who was shadowed by the charge of heresy and at all events closely connected with the fount and centre of subversive doctrine.

Meantime, while he ruled the Order, he wrote copiously and beautifully: theology, philosophy, exegesis and commentaries on the works of Peter Lombard and of Aristotle. The central point of all his teaching was the knowledge acquired by mystic contemplation, in which he embodied the true Franciscan attitude towards Science. For him it was not sufficient to hear of a new fact; far more was to be learned by meditating on it, until it became a symbol, a spring of inspiration, a vehicle of worship, and an expression of God's love. It is impossible to overestimate the influence of this new mode of vision upon the development of Italian poetry during the next generation. All that is finest in the *Dolce Stil* can be traced to this supremely creative doctrine, which made poets out of a group of gay young students at Bologna, and the greatest poet that the world has known out of a political intellectual of Florence. Thus in the family tree of modern literature a place of no small importance must be claimed for Bonaventure, as the transmitter of the Franciscan message to the learned. Moreover, he was himself an exquisite Latin poet, as his lovely hymn, the popular "*Ave, Celeste Lilium!*" sufficiently attests. A happy poet was he also in his institution of the Angelus, the bell that rings three times each day, to call the world to pause in its stream of business and say its "Ave" to the Mother of God.

At the Chapter-General of Narbonne in 1260 Bonaventure was requested to write a new life of St. Francis, the outcome being that beautiful "Legenda Major," which with the Lives of Thomas of Celano and the "Legend of the Three Companions," must always be a chief authority for all Franciscan study.

He made use of other personal memoirs than those known to the Celanese; he went to Assisi to consult the documents, and to interrogate the surviving companions of St. Francis, among whom were Leo, Illuminato and Giles, the latter in the last year of his life. Most happy was Bonaventure in the subject of his masterpiece; for the deeper the love, the fuller the understanding and the truer the reflection of the kindred soul.

Thomas Aquinas, about to visit Bonaventure, found him writing in his cell, caught a glimpse of him through a chink and withdrew in silence. "*Sinamus Sanctum qui laborat pro Sancto*," was his explanation; for he too was a saint and understood. On another occasion the "Angelical Doctor" asked Bonaventure how he found time to study, for he marvelled at his depth and sweetness, as well as his wise ruling of the Order. "My book is the Crucifix," said Bonaventure.

The beautiful "Legenda Major" was finished by 1263, and presented to the Chapter-General which met that year at Pisa. It was at once accepted as definitive, as superseding all the previous legends. Nevertheless, the writing of spurious lives continued, every malcontent being desirous of discovering or inventing some episode in Francis's life on which to base his peculiar grievance against authority. So three years later, in 1266, the Chapter-General, meeting at Paris, ordered all other Lives, save this "The Greater Legend," to be destroyed—a measure much to be regretted in view of the pleasant modern pastime of Franciscan study and research. But what we must balance is not the merit of one particular official Life against the many spurious and apocryphal, but the maintenance of a single pure and Catholic tradition, against the confusion of a mass of tales accumulating continually, to the obscuring of truth, the disseminating of false ideals, and the breeding of dissensions. That doubtless was the reasoning of the Chapter.

In 1254 died Innocent, in 1261 Alexander, in 1264 Urban, in 1268 Clement, each the fourth Pope of his name. Clement pressed on Bonaventure the Archbishopric of York, which, with greater wisdom than inspired the offer, the latter declined. For at this moment nothing was more bitterly resented in our island than the intrusion of foreign prelates into English sees.

After the death of Clement the Papacy was vacant for two years. It has been said, but with little probability, that it was offered to Bonaventure; it is possible that he was asked to suggest a name, and in truth the wisdom of the choice might

argue his intervention. Theobald, the saintly exiled Archdeacon of Liège, as Gregory X, aspired to be the peacemaker of Christendom and, like his predecessor Innocent III, summoned a Council-General to effect his purpose, and to proclaim a great crusade.

But the first act of the new Pope was to make a Cardinal of Bonaventure, who, hearing of his design, fled to Paris secretly and set to work on his "Visions of the Church." He was ordered to return and caught near Florence in a little convent of the Mugello. The nuncios found him in the kitchen, the sleeves of his habit rolled up, for he was washing plates. They produced the gorgeous scarlet hat, which he would not soil with greasy fingers. "Hang it up on that tree," said the Minister-General, "and show the nuncios to the parlour!"

The Œcumenical Council met at Lyons in 1274. It marks the apogee of Papal power combined with moral greatness. It aimed at the permanent peace of Christendom and the reconciliation with the Eastern Church. For the moment, at any rate, it attained both ends; the Latin and Greek clergy passed the act of union, acknowledged the supremacy of St. Peter's chair and chanted the Creed together. The Council voted a tenth of all Church revenues for the succour of the Holy Land, drew up salutary regulations for the discipline of the clergy and the reform of the abuses of the Papal conclaves. In all these great achievements we may trace the influence of Bonaventure, who laboured and inspired all with the sweetness of his personality. Suddenly, in the midst of his great triumph, he fell sick and within a week was dead, at the age of fifty-three.

Beloved of all, he was followed to his grave in the convent of the Minorites at Lyons by the Pope and the prelates of all Christendom, and the Cardinal of Ostia expressed the general sorrow in his funeral sermon, "*Doleo super te, frate mi Jonatha, amabilis et dilecte nimis!*" He did not live to see the death of Gregory after little more than a year, and with it the downfall of his cherished work; and although he had to wait nigh upon two centuries for canonization, yet was he singled out by Dante as a chief figure of his Paradise; for he had left behind him the memory of one of the sweetest, wisest, and holiest of saintly scholars, an example for all learned Sons of Francis to ensue.

CHAPTER IX

Jacopone da Todi—His Native City in his Day and Now—His Youth—His Conversion—His Poetry—Pope Celestine and the Spirituals—Imprisonment—Release and Death of Jacopone.

I

JACOPONE DA TODI—a fantastic figure in a fantastic scene! God's fool, God's poet; half saint, half cynic; usurious lawyer, and mystic poet; selfish libertine and wild ascetic—his life and his soul alike are by a single hour bisected, and each half seems to show a perfect contrast to its fellow.

As one descends the ridge on the far side of Bevagna, following the old Flamminian Way as it strikes down towards Rome, his city stands up like a ship out of the mists of the Valley of the Tiber, the strangest and oldest of all the strange old cities that link the ages in this ancient land. As one wanders up and down its narrow lanes between dark silent palaces, or around its high Etruscan walls with their huge Cyclopean stones, one feels the far, grim Pagan city nearer to us than the romantic town of mediæval times. A fallen capital of central Italy, it was old in Roman days—old, sad, forsaken, as it is to-day; in Jacopone's it was younger, busier, gayer, with its painted wooden galleries and balconies, its careless throng of knights and ladies, its constant round of feasts and pageantry. In the middle of the thirteenth century its walls were almost as ancient as they are now, and its temples, forums and theatres were more numerous; but the lively clink and clatter of the stone-masons filled the air, bringing a sense of growth and glorious revival. The great cathedral with its splendid stairway was but recently restored, the Palace of the Captain with its fine arcade and the Palace of the People were a-building; the citizens had already found their walls too strait for them and were settling on the slopes around, in houses soon to be enclosed within the outer circuit.

Thus it was in the midst of a young, growing city, with new

palaces and churches rising, that Jacomo dei Benedetti first saw light, in or about the year 1230. His family was well-to-do and among the noblest of the local aristocracy, and the boy was brought up to luxury, much as Francis in Assisi fifty years before. About the age of fifteen he was sent off to Bologna, to study law at the great University for seven or more years, and wildest was he among the wild, extravagant and quarrelsome; indulgent, insolent, reckless, dissolute—if we can believe his later witness against himself. But he learned his canon law, to his own subsequent advantage, and, much more than this, to the world's gain he acquired the trick of verse. For Bologna at this time was a forcing-ground of intellect and the home and centre of that school of song from which arose the *Dolce Stil* in the next generation. Leader among poets was the hapless captive Enzo, son of Frederick II, who gathered round him in his courtly imprisonment the young romantic spirits of his age. Doubtless Ser Jacomo dei Benedetti was among them and learned to write ballads and love-sonnets to the many ladies, to whom, as he tells us, he would pay his not invariably repulsed advances.

About the age of twenty-two, having taken his degree, Ser Jacomo came back to Todi; but his extravagance made such inroads on his patrimony that before long he was obliged to turn his learning to account, which he did to such effect as lawyer, notary and usurer, that he rapidly became one of the wealthiest of the citizens. In 1268, at the approach of middle age, he fell in love with a beautiful girl of a noble family of Coldimezzo, courted, won and wed her, bringing her back to live in a great house that was situated on the east side of the circle of Etruscan walls, between the little Church of S. Ilario, where he worshipped, and the fountain of Scarnabecco, whence the water for his house must have been drawn. In the sixteenth-century palace which stands between these landmarks, collateral descendants of the Benedetti show a portrait of the poet, in a hall that is decorated with curious frescoes recording some of the most characteristic legends of his life.

Suddenly in mid-career, at the age of thirty-eight, there came on this reformed fastidious libertine, this cultured and successful dignitary—somewhat complacent, one would have guessed, and more than a little sceptical—a crisis that upset his poise and utterly reversed the lines on which his life was settling down. His fair young bride was dancing with a gay

company on one of the wooden galleries so common in those times, when the structure collapsed with the weight of dancers, precipitating the crowd into the street. Alone of all the throng she was wounded and within a few hours died. Moreover, the accident revealed a most poignant secret; for, under her festal clothes, her husband found a rough hair-shirt of penance, worn for the redemption of his sins! Her death was victory, and his new beginning; Ser Jacomo died with her to the world.

He sold his palace and distributed his wealth among the poor, indulging his frantic grief in bitter mockery. For a while he was undoubtedly demented and many tales were afterwards told of him for the amusement of the crowd. Doubtless, in many episodes truth and his good fame—like Brother Juniper's—were sacrificed to the enlivenment of a sermon. It is said that he attended the marriage-feast of one of his rich relations covered with tar and feathers; that he asked for bread at a convent door dressed in a donkey's skin; or saddled and bridled like an ass walked about on all-fours begging. More wit was shown when, requested by a friend to take a pair of chickens "home," he laid them in the family vault, as the man's permanent dwelling. But such stories were so precious to the market-preacher that they are repeated with slight variations of scores of more or less legendary figures, tricked out in saintly motley to provoke a roar.

Meanwhile his scorn of the world and the flesh was poured out in rough verses that he doubtless sang and acted as he roamed about the land. As an itinerant preacher he must have been extraordinarily effective, a master of vituperation, of violent dramatic contrast, of coarse crude imagery, of terse and mordant phrase. To the trained eloquence of the professional advocate was added the vehemence of intense conviction and the fine ecstasy of inspiration. To the conventionalized and sophisticated Sons of Francis of the second or third generation he was at once a cause of scandal, of division, of heart-searching; for in the violence of his love of God, of his self-scorn and renouncement, he seemed to recall in caricature the Master they professed to follow. It is a curious comment on the change that had come over the Order since the days when Francis and Rufino stood together, half-naked, in the open-air pulpit of Assisi, seeking the mockery of the crowd, that only wept for them, to remember that for months and years the Franciscans of a small house of S. Fortunato repeatedly

refused to accept Ser Jacomo lest his peculiarities should bring them into disrepute!

When finally some ten years after his conversion they received him into their community it seems that they were far from edified; no doubt they comprehended less the fervour of his poetry than the lash of his relentless irony on their complacent lives. So when his restless spirit urged him forth to preach, his plea was seconded by their natural willingness to let him go. He wandered far and wide through the little towns and villages; he stayed in lonely hermitages; he went to Rome and laboured as secretary to prelates and, living ascetically, earned the reputation of saintliness. But all the while he poured out his soul in verses—in verses that from the harsh note of the first years of his purgation were gradually attuned to spiritual sweetness and the larger harmonies of mystic love.

II

The poems of Jacopone da Todi follow in their form the models of the Provençal and Sicilian Schools of Poetry, and of their imitators in Bologna, Tuscany and elsewhere; but in spirit they are related rather to the religious "laude" of the period and also to the popular "contrasti." Apart from their mystic love, their chief quality as a whole is a vivid dramatic realism, that strikes and holds the interest by continual freshness and the surprise of new developments; the very antithesis of the conventional love-ballads from which they derived their forms. What could be more effective than the little homely touches in that long grumble on the ills of life, "O Vita Penosa," with its admirable representation of the weary discontent of the satiated pessimist, striving eternally for material satisfaction? You have the discomfort of coming into the world, the misery of infancy tied up in swaddling bands, the waking up of mother in the cold winter night with a persistent useless wail; the tedium of learning letters; the punishments at school, bullyings, beatings, kickings, being trampled on like grapes in a vat; then the humiliating want of money, burden of debt and ennui of society; satiety of vice, disillusionment of marriage, the cares of having children or disappointment of having none; winter, with its icy wind, its rain and mire; summer with flies by day and fleas by night; cold in the head or fever; the doctor with his nauseous bolus and his bill; the weariness, monotony, and squalor of old age; and

all this long boredom, only at the last to be damned! In short, the poem is a very vivid, gross and consolatory grumble, a shrewd showing-up of fine Ser Jacomo, now utterly submerged in Jacopone!

Then there is the dialogue between two old men, one rich and persecuted by a niece who wished him dead, the other poor and lonely, and both at one in communion of suffering humanity. Then you have the dialogue between the Body and the Soul, with a tale of all the penances to be inflicted by the latter on his partner.

The poignant realism of these pieces is their highest art; reduced to formal smoothness they would be pointless. It is absurd to talk of Jacopone as a rude or an artless poet. Much has been made of the undoubted fact that he wrote in dialect, in Umbrian or Tudertine dialect—but in what else should he write? Dante and the *Dolce Stil* had not yet elevated Tuscan to the primacy among the tongues of Italy. Ser Jacomo dei Benedetti wrote like the scholar that he was, using or coining all manner of new learned words to express in an unformed language thoughts unknown to it. Compared with his poems the ballads of the courtly Sicilians—Tuscanized to their present form by later generations—seem naïve and puerile, while those of the *Dolce Stil* are cold and artificial. The realism is the result of the vivid realization of imaginary scenes depicted, and the force that the poet felt in the direct appeal to life. This is no more than to say that the poetry of Jacopone was "Franciscanism" in Literature, as the dramatic realism of Giotto was in Art. For the rest, no scholar can ever shake off his training, and no painter unlearn his technique. In vain Jacopone tells us that he has forsaken "the ancient writings that were so dear to him and even the rubrics of Tully that made such melody for him once"; in vain he renounces the elegance of the amorous verses that he wrote for the ladies of Bologna; he had the classical tradition, as it was understood in his day, and all the measures and the metrical tricks of the court poets. As well pronounce the poetry of Chaucer and his followers to be crude and naïve, because their language may seem quaint to-day, as hold these great dramatic ballads for rude or popular improvizations. Whatever in them seems to us commonplace was probably new then, and many a doggerel line may be no more than the emendation of a copyist, unaware of the subtlety of an original phrase. Jacopone is beyond all

question the great poet of his period, a worthy forerunner of Dante.

Among the dramatic ballads perhaps the best-known is the "Donna del Paradiso," the story of the Crucifixion told in dialogue, with the announcement of the action, the cries of the crowd, the frantic appeal of the Mother, the words of Christ from the Cross—a scene terrible in its realism, and evidently intended to wring tears from an audience in the market-place. Most beautiful are two poems upon St. Francis and a eulogy of Holy Poverty. Others are dialogues with the dead and damned, forceful revivalist homilies, doctrinal or moral sermons, complaints of the laxity to the Order, laments on the state of the world and the Church, and several political satires, of which we must speak later.

But the greatest of his poems are the mystic odes, for Love was his deepest inspiration. "Lord, grant me death," he cries in one, "before I offend Thee again!" "O gentle Love, Who died for love, I pray Thee, slay me for Love!" But how convey the faintest conception of the concentrated ardour of spiritual passion almost unequalled through the ages? The three hundred lines of the "Amor de Caritate" are a single jet of flame-like inspiration, bursting out through the lips of a man inebriate with the love of God. The poem is, as it were, the counterpart of Francis's mystic crucifixion, an expression in words, as that in flesh, of the miracle of union. These poems stand apart among the highest of religious utterances, the passionate sublimation of the Franciscan faith.

III

In April 1292 died Nicholas IV, Franciscan Pope, and a conclave of twelve Cardinals met to determine his successor. Month after month it debated, till the civil anarchy of Rome drove it to Perugia, where yet it wrangled on. Finally, to the secular threat of royal indignation was added the spiritual menace of heavenly retribution in a mysterious apocalyptic letter, purporting to have been written by a certain hermit of the remote Abruzzi, by name Peter Morrone, a man of humble birth and little education, who by his strange austerities for over fifty years had earned a reputation for great holiness. This man had been a leader of hermits in his day, had drawn a crowd of illiterate penitents around him, and formed them into a kind of brotherhood; now miracles

performed beside his cell caused pilgrimages to flow to it from all the savage countryside.

To the conclave the letter came as an inspiration, suggesting a solution to its interminable perplexities. The reputed author was chosen Pontiff by unanimous election. Ambassadors found the Pope Elect clothed in his shaggy sackcloth and crouching in a filthy cave, wherein he could neither stand nor kneel nor sit upright, nor stretch himself out upon the ground. Weeping, protesting, he was dragged forth to the world, robed in pontificals, guarded lest he should flee, set on an ass, of which kings held the bridle, and so led into the town of Aquila, amid the acclamations of enthusiastic crowds. Never was human honour more reluctantly accepted, or more popularly bestowed!

Moreover, as the news spread over the hills of Italy there were proud rejoicings in innumerable distant hermitages, where men believed that holiness consisted in the cultivation of all outward signs of squalor, ignorance and self-humiliation. At last, they thought, had come a man from God who should enforce the full severity of the Rule of Poverty.

Once more we must remember the dilemma of St. Francis whether he should go forth as a preacher and apostle or give himself up to prayer and contemplation. He had asked counsel of St. Clare and of Silvestro; would the answer of Bernard and Rufino have been the same? He had put the affairs of the Order during his lifetime into the hands, first of Peter Cataneo, then of Elias, and he had founded a Third Order for persons who lived amid the crowd. He knew intuitively that the great defect of the world in his time was the separation from it of all men of holy life. The fault of the Benedictines in the security of their refined seclusion—whether in the older seats of learning, such as Bobbio, Farfa, Fossanova, Monte Cassino or a hundred other stately abbeys, or of the followers of the reforming saints of later generations, St. Romuald and his Camaldolesi, St. John Gualberto and his Vallombrosans, St. Bruno and his Carthusians, St. Bernard and his Cistercians—was that they drew the men of peace and piety away from the populous cities, where they might surely have been an influence for good. On the other hand, every hill-top, every lonely glen in Italy, had its cell, its shrine, its chapel of the solitary ascetic, who, apart from whatever his prayers and vigils might effect, contributed little positively to the redemp-

tion of his kind. St. Bonaventure was surely right in his conception of the Franciscan mission, to reinforce the Bishops and the secular clergy, overburdened as they were with the administration of great cures, by means of large communities, dwelling in the heart of cities, who should preach, teach, nurse, shrive and civilize the crowd. In spite of many jealousies, prejudices and slanders, this is the work that the Mendicant Orders did; a fact that is amply demonstrated by the map of any Italian town. If its Abbey or Certosa of the former age dreams amid quiet woodlands, smiling pastures, airy hills, its S. Francesco, S. Antonio or Sta. Croce—like its chief Dominican church—works in the centre of its most populous streets and alleys, binding its wounds, nursing its plagues, healing its feuds, shriving its sins and burying its dead, holding the lamp of faith and ordered beauty in the gross darkness of its passions, ignorance and cruelty.

The exceptions to this rule are the little mountain hermitages, founded in the first days, enlarged in the following century, for the shelter of the few, true mediæval spirits, who sought by a rigid literal adherence to what they conceived to be the intention of the Founder to justify their indulgence for unbroken solitude, forgetting that he only resorted to this "sharing of the life of angels" in order to refresh his spiritual powers, exhausted by his exceptional faculty of giving himself forth. For to him the life of prayer was a "storing-up of grace," to be lavished again in contact with the world.

A few of this second or third generation of Franciscans, such as Angelo Clareno, Ubertino of Casale, Thomas of Tolentino, Liberato of Macerato, the extreme men of the "Spiritual Party," not only honestly believed that they were the sole followers of Francis, but that they were obliged to denounce all signs of change, and place themselves in opposition to authority. There will always be good men, who from a mistaken loyalty to origins, will be utterly disloyal to their natural consequence, forgetting that all living things inevitably develop and that the same Spirit that inspired their beginnings also guides their growth. Ideals of the past are true or false in strict relation to the present, and the test must be not, have they changed? but, in which form will they better serve their cause to-day? These dissidents spent half their lives in fighting their own superiors, in writing controversial books that only aroused new strife; they lashed their flesh into subjection and their souls

into rebellion and advanced that cause no whit in the surrounding world.

So Celestine on his accession was beset by solitaries, who besought him to establish their plea. But albeit himself a hermit, he was by no means without shrewdness, and he realized the futility of trying to satisfy these rigourists by such attempted enforcement upon the Order as a whole of the Rule as they interpreted it. He bade those who so wished to enroll themselves under his own banner; he bade them add even to their rigours; he gave them a Cardinal Protector of their own —Napoleone Orsini—and told them to say, if any questioned, that they were "the poor hermit Brothers of Lord Celestine, who keep the rule of Poverty in desert places." So a certain number of them became thenceforward Celestines and several also changed their names, to the frequent confusion of their biographers.

But in a few months, notwithstanding his great holiness, the inadequacy of Celestine became so manifest that the advice of the Cardinals, seconding his own deep longing, induced the poor old hermit to lay down his office and ask to be allowed to retire to his cave. Actually he was imprisoned by his successor Boniface and, hidden in distant castles, lived on for eighteen months. Meanwhile the "Spirituals" would not admit the new election or that the visions of a hermit saint might not control the world. Some of them scattered in their disappointment to their little mountain eyries; Angelo Clareno and a few of his companions crossed the sea and made a settlement in the island of Trixonia in the Gulf of Corinth and wandered thence amid the monasteries of Achaia, even into Thessaly, carrying amid the strongholds of a rival Church the scandal of their revolt against the Ruler of their own. To their credit be it said the Greek Bishops would not listen; the Patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated them and they were forced to return to Italy.

But not all of their party took this treacherous step; some braved the wrath of the new Pope with challenge and defiance. Loudest in challenge, first to fall, was the poet Jacopone.

IV

Crossing the Campagna between Rome and Tivoli, travellers will surely note a vast forbidding fortress, that towers up against purple hills at a hamlet called Lunghezza. It may have been

the site of the ancient city of Collatia, for hence the road to Rome is called Via Collatina. In this castle, then a stronghold of the Colonna, on May 10th, 1297, a manifesto was issued, calling upon Boniface to resign the Papacy, since, Celestine's abdication being caused by human agency, the election of his successor could not be divine. The signatories declared the Apostolic Succession broken, the Papacy voided, the Sacraments profaned; only a General Council could declare the truth, remove abuses and elect a Pope. This document was signed by two Colonna Cardinals, five prelates and three Spiritual Franciscans, the first of whom was Fra. Jacopo da Todi. The manifesto was laid on the high altar of St. Peter's, and nailed to the door of several Roman churches; it caused the instant excommunication of the rebels, who retreated to the Colonna citadel of Palestrina. For a whole year this castle was besieged by the Papal forces; readers of Dante will recall his account of its surrender and the part in it played, as he alleges, by another Franciscan, Guido of Montefeltro, placed in Hell for this same sin.

In the beleaguered fortress was the poet Jacopone, singing no more rapt songs of love, but uttering bitter diatribes against Boniface and harsh laments for the condition of the Church. His attitude towards the Papacy seems always to have been that of the Ghibelline noble, suspicious, even contemptuous; he had already addressed to Celestine an ode quite other than respectful, challenging him to reveal his temper to the test. Now he flings scornful invective at Pope Boniface with a strident violence only to be equalled by Dante's fiercest rage. He writes him an ode which is a tempest of vituperation, charging him with every crime—simony, schism, avarice, pride, tyranny, ambition, and the sowing of strife, declaring the Pope renews himself in scandal like salamander in the flames! At his first Mass tempests arose and extinguished the lights upon the altar, at his coronation forty men were crushed to death, to show the divine displeasure! Like a new Lucifer he sets his throne over against the Most High, filling the world with the poison of blasphemy and sin!

When Palestrina fell into the Papal hands it was not possible that the author of such affronts should go unpunished. Jacopone languished for five years in the fetid dungeons of the castle of Palestrina, to imprisonment being added excommunication, which seems to have wrung from the unhappy poet

pleadings of more submissive tone. But his lot was not relieved until after the death of Boniface, that miserable death from rage and heartbreak after the awful outrage of Anagni—that buffet that rang out the century of Papal domination, a mediæval act that marked the end of the Middle Ages.

But through all the horror of these years Jacopone kept his faith, his poetry, his divine illumination. Of his miseries he made light in satirical verses—that remind one of his "Contention" betwixt Soul and Body and the penances imposed by the one upon the other—made light of his chains, his underground home, that did not smell of musk, of the basket hung up where the mice could not reach it, with a stale crust in it and an onion to whet his appetite—on which he "fattened like a pig in a sty, albeit without hope of becoming bacon!" Armed as he is with hatred of himself, and love of suffering and humiliation, he puts all the enemies of his soul to flight.

Nonetheless, when once released, how exquisitely his music changes! It is impossible to know with certainty the period of each poem, but one likes to believe that his liberation inspired that lovely cry that Love so straitly besieged him around the five gates of his senses that whether he sallied forth by vision, hearing, taste, smell or touch, all that he found was Love to lead him captive, forcing him to yield up the citadel of his soul.

But his poems must be left to those who can overcome the difficulty of their dialect, the monotony, for a modern ear, of their trotting ballad metres, the primitive crudity of their too insistent realism, the simplicity of their obvious artifices, and their all too frequent rhymes—who, despite these faults, will read and ponder the intense sincerity of their spiritual passion and the varied wealth of imagery in which it is expressed.

Released from the five years of durance in his subterranean dungeon, Jacopone wearily wandered back to those convents of the Order that were close to the town of his birth, in particular to Pantanelli, where amid its quiet pastures and fair woods beside the Tiber, he is said to have written that great hymn, the "Stabat Mater," most human of all hymns in the Catholic Liturgy, a more reserved and nobler version of his "Donna del Paradiso." The change of tone has been explained as the result of the restraint imposed by the more solemn tongue.

Finally, being well over seventy, he retired into a little

convent on the hill at Collazone, a village that stands out clearly as one looks north from Todi. The view from the window of his cell must have embraced all that was most significant in his long and varied life—the house of his birth, the scene of his youthful riots, the castle where he went to pay court to his young bride, the home of their happiness and his worldly prosperity, the scene of his bitter loss and wild conversion, the woods or caves in which he hid during the madness of his grief, the stage of his pranks and preachings, his remorse and revelation. Of all of mankind that he met it seems that there were but two who truly loved and understood him, the one his young wife who did penance for his conversion, and the other that great mystic, Brother John of La Verna, purest and holiest of Franciscans.

As the year 1306 was drawing to its close, Jacopone was manifestly growing weaker. His companions in the convent saw the end approaching and urged him to receive the Sacraments. He replied that he would take them from the hand of Brother John; an answer which disturbed the friars not a little, for John was many miles away and death was near at hand. Even if they should send for him across the wintry world, how could the old man ever come in time? They persisted in their exhortations; Jacopone in his refusal. Then all at once on Christmas Eve up the steep road two friars were seen approaching, and one was Brother John! A few hours later the two white heads were bowed together over the Sacrament, while the Christmas bells rang out at midnight and the poet's burning soul passed to its rest.

By the Church he has never been quite forgiven for his savage invectives on Pope Boniface; still only by the popular voice is he beatified. His body lies buried in the crypt of the Church of S. Fortunato at Todi, a few yards away from the house of his birth and the convent which at first rejected him, and afterwards set these words upon his grave: "Here lie the bones of the Blessed Jacopone dei Benedetti da Todi, of the Order of the Friars Minor, who, as a Fool for Christ's sake, by a new artifice deceived the world, and captured Heaven by storm."

CHAPTER X

The Painters of S. Francesco—Cimabue—The Roman Masters—Giotto and His School—The Sienese.

I

IF the chief message of St. Francis is the humanizing of the Christian religion, that of his Basilica is the humanizing of Christian Art. It is true that the process was beginning in his lifetime, that even the crucifix of his conversion at S. Damiano differs from most of the earlier crucifixes in that the eyes have life, sorrow and love in them. But, as a whole, we may say that before the days of Francis Art was symbolical rather than representative, whereas during the century that followed his death it grew to be even more than representative —expressive—that is, moving and inspiring in the onlooker sentiments deeper than his own. It became, in short, a vehicle of feeling. This transition, so intimately bound up with the expansion of Franciscanism, so closely akin to the Franciscan inspiration, one may trace as nowhere else in the Franciscan church. It is a theme of such vast import in the history of humanity that all disputed points of date and authorship become subsidiary.

The masters of mosaic, whose great works we may see in Ravenna, Rome and Sicily, apart from their purely decorative aim of clothing a wall in a gorgeous robe of gold and jewelled colour, seem to have sought to give the scenes depicted majesty, grandeur, rather than human life. The earliest frescoes in S. Francesco are those in the nave of the Lower Church, representing, on the right, subjects from the Passion, the "Ecce Mater Tua," the Death of Christ, the Descent from the Cross, the Burial; on the left, five subjects from the Life of Francis —the Renunciation, the Dream of Innocent, the Preaching to the Birds, the Stigmatization, and the Death of the Saint. These frescoes were mutilated when the original narrow windows were enlarged to make entrances into the chapels; they

have steadily peeled from the walls, and have suffered restoration; yet enough remains to show how suited they were to the simple but splendid decoration of the vaults and arches, and to the majestic architecture they were designed to clothe. In them we still see the dignity of the older period, in the superhuman stature of the figures, the solemn action and restraint of grief, combined with a new spirit of life, of actuality, in the picturing of episodes known to have taken place within the memory of the living. The assertion of the parallel, the mystic correspondence between the lives of Francis and of Christ, so common in later Franciscan symbolism, is here set forth for the first time. The representation of a theme so new as the Preaching to the Birds demanded that the scene should be taken straight from life. These works may be by Giunta Pisano, as Professor Venturi holds, or by a later, local artist, whom one may call the Master of S. Francesco, but whoever painted them was painting episodes as imagination pictured them and faith divined their spiritual significance.

The next frescoes in order of date are the great works of Cimabue and his school in the choir and transepts of the Upper Church. In the choir are represented the Life, Death and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, with half-length figures of the two chief Papal Founders of the Basilica, Gregory IX and Innocent IV, on either side of the Papal Throne. In the left transept are scenes from the Apocalypse of St. John, in the right from the legends of St. Peter and St. Paul. Greatest among these perished masterpieces is the movement of the seven Angels with the trumpets of the Judgment, the majesty of the great winged Watchers through the arcades of the triforium, and the tragic dignity and passion of the magnificent Crucifixion. The last is faded to an almost colourless wraith, wherein the lights and shadows are reversed, through the treacherous darkening of some bright pigment; but the awful solemnity of the gigantic central Figure, the passionate gesture of the Magdalene's despair, the energy of conviction in the Centurion who proclaims the Godhead of the Victim, the guilty dread of the Scribes and Pharisees, and at the foot of the Cross the tiny humble Francis, kissing the ground from which it springs—combine to achieve a representation of earth's mightiest tragedy at once so impressive, suggestive and sincere, as to be almost unique in Art.

Next come the probably contemporaneous frescoes upon the

vaults and upper section of the walls of the nave of this church, also in places almost ruined by six intervening centuries, with their inevitable periods of restoration and neglect. They are said to be the work of Jacopo Turriti, Filippo Rusuti and Pietro Cavallini. They represent scenes from the Old and New Testament, and for anyone who has time, good eyes and insight they are a mine of beauty and spiritual education. Especially striking is the mighty gesture of Abraham, stayed from slaying Isaac, and the story in two frescoes of the latter Patriarch's blessing; exquisite is the rendering of the Nativity with its tall reclining Virgin, the sleeping Joseph, the Child in a cave, watched over by ox and ass, the Angels above addressing two faithful shepherds, and these looked up to by most Franciscan sheep! Fine too is the "Kiss of Judas" below this, with its two protagonists of superhuman stature and the vivid dramatic feeling of the crowd. These and many more are worthy of long study, while the vaults and arches are rich with infinite wealth of detail, which few indeed will have time and strength to examine as it deserves.

The last great picture of this period in the decoration of the Basilica is the lovely Madonna of Cimabue, sitting enthroned in the right transept of the Lower Church, attended by four Angels and St. Francis, in probably the truest likeness that has come down to us. The sweetness of this simple girl Madonna, so exalted, forms one of the most beautiful conceptions in Assisi, worthy to rank with the mighty Crucifixion, whose shadowy ruins are perhaps the Master's masterpiece.

All these great works were painted between or about the years 1280 and 1290, or at least we may say with safety, in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. During the same period in the Upper Church many of the storied windows were made from the designs of the men who adorned the walls, Cimabue, Turriti, Cavallini. Not a few of them were afterwards much disfigured by restoration, and were removed from their proper places, but they remain one of the glories of the church. Apart from the crudity of colour, and the decorative inferiority of the later substitutions, what irritates us most is their pretentious realism, the assumption that modern Art can improve on the old designs. Wherever the old perspective or anatomy was symbolical, we may be sure it was not from lack of skill, but deliberate intent. By an accepted principle of spiritual perspective the chief personages were made large and

grand, and the lesser in diminutive proportion. It is the principle of Greek tragic representation, the artificial emphasis of the tall protagonist, the God or Hero with his stilts and mask. These frescoes are almost Art's last assertion, before abandonment, of one of its chief traditional prerogatives—the selection of the aristocracy of significance among the figures in a picture, henceforward hardly to be compensated by centrality of position or even by the halo. The perspective of spiritual significance was the saving secret of the Middle Ages; its loss is probably the chief defect of our chaotic modern life.

II

In our brief consideration of the great works of Cimabue and his immediate contemporaries in the Upper Church of S. Francesco, we have seen how Art was emerging from the grand, formal or "symbolical," Byzantine tradition into a more human representation of historic scenes. This movement followed the similar tendency in literature, whereby the vulgar tongue was superseding the more conventional Latin as the vehicle of poetry, and as in the realistic poems of Jacopone da Todi, was not only expressing strong religious feeling, but also describing the most intimate details of common daily life. Even the Latin prose-writers of the period, such as our authorities for the Franciscan story, Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure—not to mention the authors of the "Speculum Perfectionis"—deliberately laid aside the customary ornaments of contemporary literature, telling their story simply and humanly, to the infinite advantage of their readers of to-day. The movement is all one, whether it show itself in Art, Religion, Prose or Poetry, these manifestations being no more than phases of the great spiritual awakening, the heightening and refining of emotional values throughout the western world. Partly no doubt it was the result of political and economic progress—a greater security, minimizing fear; increased prosperity, reducing hardship. A century earlier the Franciscan movement would not have been possible. A century later it would have been swamped by the tide of intellectual scepticism. It may be summed up as a new expression of religion for the people, in terms that they were now prepared to understand—no longer only those of Fear, of Wonder, of Authority, enforced by threats of punishment, but those of Love, of emotional appeal, borne out by human stories.

Now, whether in the domain of Art, Poetry or Religion, a new emotion, a new spiritual impulse, has seldom had long to wait upon expression. Power of language will never long be lacking to a nation, or an age, that has anything to say. In how short a time from the first stammerings of verse in an Italian dialect did Poetry achieve its sublimest heights in the Divine Comedy of Dante! How rapidly from the first infusion of the new emotional life into the stiff Byzantine formula did Art attain to its most human triumph in the masterpieces of Giotto!

Given his genius, therefore, Giotto was inevitable, as the exponent in fresco of the new spirit of the world. It is also fitting that the development of his genius should be traced most clearly in Assisi, the city that had given birth to the most radiant example in the realm of intensest spiritual life. His task was to tell new stories, not merely symbolically, but humanly and dramatically, to excite the interest and move the hearts of those who read them in his pictures. Emotional truth, dramatically rendered, carried with it more vivid life, and a surer plastic representation—qualities for which modern critics have invented all manner of technical names.

For the study of Giotto in his most authentic works, as well as in his highest technical perfection, the churches in Assisi cannot compare with the Chapel of the Arena at Padua. But, on the other hand, for the general appreciation of his message the churches of Assisi are unique, for there he can be seen in close juxtaposition and intimate contrast with painters who preceded or closely followed him.

Unfortunately, little with regard to the life of Giotto, and in particular, the works that he painted in Assisi, has the unanimous consent of all the critics. But whether he was brought up as a shepherd in the Mugello Valley or as a smith in the parish of Santa Maria Novella, it is probable, although uncertain, that Cimabue taught him and brought him to Assisi, while he was still a youth. In Assisi, perhaps in this very church, he may have watched dramatic renderings of the sacred episodes, which, ever since St. Francis's day, were common in the convents of his Order. No one can avoid the impression that the composition of Giotto's pictures was greatly influenced by such representations; for they have a sense of the confinement of a small wooden booth; interiors made of painted poles and curtains; a woodenness about the "pro-

perties " and the symbolism of scenic backgrounds that inevitably suggest the mediæval stage.

In S. Francesco there are in all four main groups of frescoes which are obviously the work of Giotto or his school. They are—the " Life of St. Francis " in twenty-eight frescoes around the lower portion of the walls of the nave of the Upper Church ; the four great " Allegories of the Franciscan Virtues " over the vault of the high altar of the Lower ; the various series, such as three " Miracles of St. Francis," the eight episodes from the " Infancy of Christ " and other scenes on the barrel vault of the right transept and in the adjoining Chapel of St. Nicholas, and the fine series of the " Life of St. Mary Magdalene " in her adjacent chapel. Each of these has in turn been attributed to Giotto and each has in turn been denied to him ; it is impossible to give even a summary of the intricate reasons. We take as an example three of the latest books published in the last few years. Of the series in the Upper Church Prof. Supino gives all but the last four to the great Master ; Prof. Venturi seven only and the rest to a variety of painters, including the Masters from Rome ; Prof. Carrà denies that Giotto ever painted in Assisi. But practically all the earlier critics were at one in attributing at least two of the Life of St. Francis—those on the entrance wall of the nave—to Giotto, whereas immemorial tradition held him for author of the entire series. As for the great Allegories over the high altar in the Lower Church, Prof. Supino reconfirms the old, but to-day unfashionable, opinion that Giotto painted them, notwithstanding Prof. Venturi's scornful rejection of it ; but he refuses to recognize the Master's hand in the story of St. Mary Magdalene, whereas the latter critic acknowledges it in at least four out of these seven frescoes. The series of paintings on the barrel vault of the right transept, like those of the left, are generally considered, at least in part, the work of Sienese Masters, although here too there are exceptions ; while those in the Chapel of St. Nicholas are now believed to be by some follower of the great Florentine, possibly his great-grandson Giottino. But, we repeat, we only quote the opinion of a tithe of the most recent critics ; a more complete examination only leads to an ever-increasing chaos of contradiction.

But, after all, there is a great deal of pedantry in such discussions, which, except for experts, can be reduced to much simpler terms. It is obvious that even those frescoes of a

great Master which show the strongest evidence of his genius must to some extent be the work of pupils, for painting in fresco is a complicated process, requiring the assistance of a number of trained hands. In certain technical details a pupil may well have surpassed his master and such points may have been invariably left to him ; or, if we insist that a pupil was working on one fresco while the master worked on another, is it conceivable that at a moment of difficulty superior skill should not have been called in ? In any case, the designs and cartoons, without which no wall-painting is possible, must have been corrected, where not actually drawn, by the master, who thus must take responsibility for the general composition. This also explains the fact that while many frescoes of Giotto's school in these Assisan churches may seem crude and rough in workmanship, yet there are in them few mistakes, such as one would expect from inexperience, painting a new scene for the first time. The modelling may be poor, but the proportions and anatomy are usually correct, which certainly would argue the supervision of cartoons, even where the execution was left entirely to a pupil. Thus this question of actual authorship can only be one of degree, to be judged according to the extent to which certain qualities are shown in a given picture—a matter we willingly leave to those who are capable of supplying infallible technical reasons for their inevitable disagreement with every earlier opinion !

Under these circumstances we propose to treat all the so-called Giottesque works as a whole, and to try to indicate a few of their more memorable features and the conclusions which seem most relevant to our purpose. The simple point for us is that what Giotto chiefly aimed at representing was the human interest of holy stories, the human feeling ; which object he accomplished chiefly by means of expressive gesture. In the Upper Church he—or his school—covered the lower part of the walls of the whole nave with figures, each and all intent upon some human action, and expressing, not in a single limb, but their entire human body, the appropriate emotion that *informs* them. Compared with the earlier symbolical works above them, these scenes are, as it were, " living pictures " of living actors on a stage, illustrating sacred stories. For with the human figures the realism ceases ; the backgrounds and " properties " remain symbolical.

The first scene of the Life of St. Francis in the Upper Church

is the episode of the mysterious pilgrim, who, moved by prophetic knowledge of the young man's future sanctity, spreads his cloak before him in order to do him honour. The scene takes place in the Piazza of Assisi, in front of the columns of the Minerva, but these columns are five, whereas the Romans made six, and moreover the Communal Tower is completed, albeit at that time only a-building. The artist intends to indicate the Piazza, not to portray it, and these features were sufficient for identification. Again, the touching scene of St. Clare's farewell to the body of Francis undoubtedly took place within S. Damiano, not in front of it; but granted that Art dictated the transposition, why put he a glorious Florentine façade of marble upon the humble chapel? Was it merely a hint that it should be so adorned? In any case, it is clear that to Giotto "truth" was not our historic truth, with its occasional triviality and artistic inconvenience, but loyalty to his Art's particular purpose in the depicting of an episode in its full emotional power.

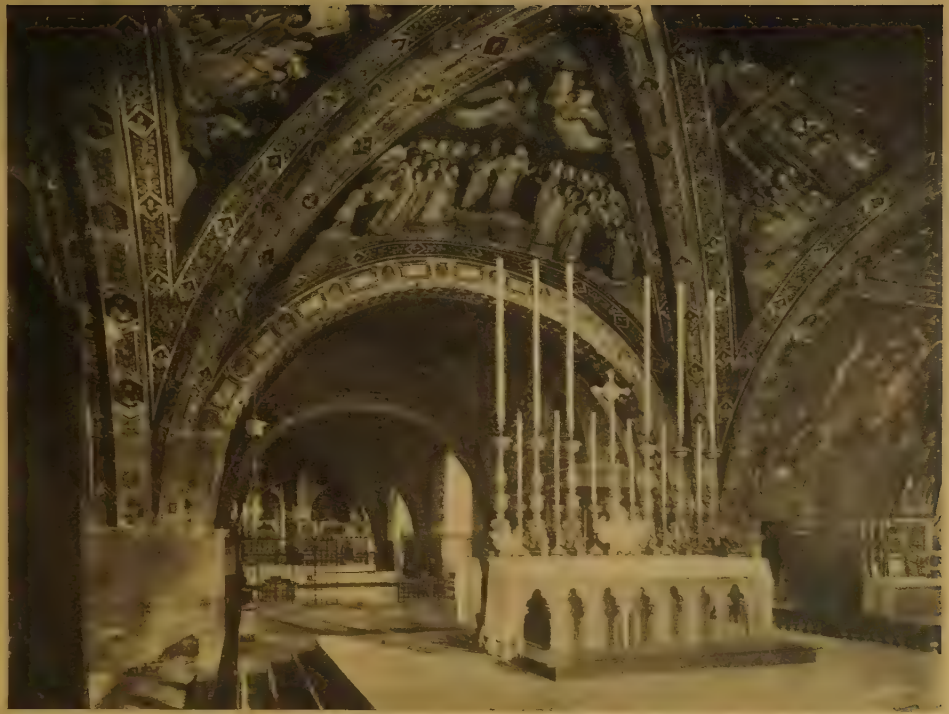
Consider the truth of the figure of the saint in the fresco of the "Dream of Innocent" with the symbolism of the falling Lateran belfry; the dramatic intensity of the scene of the "Renunciation" with the very unconvincing edifices behind it; the slightly obsequious posture of the poor knight receiving the cloak from Francis and the impatience of the horse beginning to paw the snow, with the purely conventional trees on the hill-side; the naturalness and strength of the gesture of Silvestro ordering the demons to quit Arezzo, with the incongruities of that curious city and the black figures hastening upwards through the air; the exquisite tenderness of the idyll of St. Francis preaching to the natural, but magnified, birds, with the conventional and diminutive tree from which these have emerged, and ask yourself whether the man that drew these figures with such fidelity and the marvellous prostrate body of the thirsty man in the miracle of the spring of water in the desert, could not, if he had so desired, have made his buildings as realistic as a modern artist, who is usually so obsessed with the perspective of material objects that he is blind to their relative insignificance? For Giotto the purposes of his picture were satisfied when the desired emotion was conveyed in concentrated form, nay, even stronger for the very "backwardness" of the background—on the principle whereby a play of Shakespeare gains in power from being

played upon a simple stage. But the modern world has made men not artists but collectors, until we are all in danger of becoming little more than moving pieces of our own furniture! The message of St. Francis, with its Holy Poverty, was the liberation of the human from its unessential circumstance, which is why Giotto with his cult of feeling is among the most faithful of his sons.

III

The Life of St. Francis in the Upper Church is the series of frescoes wherein the hand of Giotto is the least disputed, though even here learned opinion is at variance. The next great frescoes, still sometimes allowed to be his, are the four Allegories of the Franciscan Virtues on the central vaults of the sanctuary of the Lower Church. Allegories were very much to the taste of the age and characteristically Franciscan; Francis himself, Giotto and Dante are full of such inventions. It is well also that we should remember the circumstances of their painting, probably during the first years of the fourteenth century, when under the generalship of Giovanni di Muro a strenuous effort was made to rally the Order to a moderate observance of the old Virtues that originally had inspired it and to undo the mischief caused by the intervention of Pope Celestine into the party quarrels between the "Spirituals" and the "Relaxed."

In the central fresco facing the altar is emblazoned on a gold background the Mystical Espousals of St. Francis and the Lady Poverty, who is married to the saint by the hand of Christ Himself. The scene is a mountain top, whither Poverty in her widowhood had retired. The Bridesmaids are Faith and Charity, who present her with a ring and a heart. Above, the Bridegroom's gifts, a mantle and a palace, representing his well-known alms and his renounced inheritance, are carried up to Heaven by two flying Angels. On each side is a small subsidiary scene full of dramatic feeling: on the left, a young man, possibly Francis, gives his mantle to a beggar; on the right, another, hawk on wrist, perhaps symbolizing Pride or Rapine, refuses to listen to an Angel, while Usury or Avarice, a grave elder, clutches his purse, turning away with a sneering companion, possibly Simony or Envy. Below, two other children of this world are pointing with derision and throwing stones at Poverty.



THE LOWER CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS, ASSISI

In the fresco to the right sits Chastity in her tower, with her bell for vigilance, and her white banner flying. Angels bring her a crown and a palm. Below, within her fortress walls are Purity and Fortitude, and without are many warriors armed with the emblems of discipline for the mortification of the flesh. In the centre they are bathing a young novice in a fountain; on the one hand, they are driving out blind Love and Death and swine-headed Sin; on the other, they are welcoming in three figures, representing the three Orders, the representative of the Third Order being traditionally Dante.

In the fresco to the left Obedience, Humility, and Prudence are sitting together under a triple porch. The first with finger on lip is giving her yoke to a friar, the second a taper, while the third, two-headed, holds a compass and a mirror. Angels on each side look up in worship; one drives away Rebellion, figured as a centaur. St. Francis stands above, being drawn up to Heaven by his cord. In the central fresco over the altar, St. Francis is borne to the skies by a crowd of dancing and singing Angels, sitting in glory on the splendid throne, that, as Pacifico heard, Lucifer lost for pride. He is robed in the most gorgeous garment of Heaven, as Brother Peter saw him, because on earth his raiment was most vile; he carries the Cross and the Book of the Rule and above him is a banner with his Tau and Seven Stars.

Whether or no the Allegories were inspired by Dante, painted or not by Giotto, few will deny that, despite six centuries of seasonal changes, of daily incense-smoke and fume of tapers, they still preserve for us the loveliest embodiment of the ideals inspiring the Franciscan Life.

Consonant with the strong belief in the spiritual efficacy of relics was the universal desire of mediæval men to be buried in the vicinity of saints. We have seen how almost all the first Companions, with the exception of Giles, were laid to rest in Elias's solemn sanctuary, and how throughout the world Franciscan churches became the cherished cemeteries of the great. One of the most remarkable sepulchral monuments in S. Francesco is that popularly known as the tomb of the "Queen of Cyprus," which for good reasons, too long to set forth here, Prof. Supino holds to be the tomb of King John of Jerusalem, a great warrior, a great leader, and a considerable poet, both in French and in Sicilian; father-in-law of Frederick II, but, unlike him, a great lover of St. Francis and

a Franciscan. The monument seems to us to be a strange collection of incongruous sculptures; it is difficult to believe that they all belong to the tomb of the sleeping figure.

About the year 1300 two brothers of the Orsini family, Napoleone and Gian Gaetano, both Cardinals, built the two first chapels at the two extremities of the western transept and dedicated them to St. Nicholas and St. John the Baptist. The former is adorned with scenes from the life of St. Nicholas by a follower of Giotto, possibly his great-grandson, Giottino. For Giotto had a daughter, Caterina, who married the painter Ricco di Lapo, by whom he had two sons, Bartolo and Stefano, also painters, the latter being the father of another Giotto, called Giottino, to distinguish from his more famous ancestor. The frescoes in the Chapel of St. Nicholas have lately been carefully restored, but are difficult to see, as the altar is that of the Blessed Sacrament. Albeit they have little of the vigour of the great Master, yet his illustrative and dramatic qualities are still apparent in his school, thirty years after his death. Above all, the painter is interested in the telling of his story, which he does in a clever, although somewhat affected, way. The scenes where the dead Bishop appears to the Emperor Constantine, interrupts an unjust execution, and liberates a devotee from slavery and restores him to his parents, are all charmingly rendered and remind us of the ingenuous poetry of the "Fioretti." The chapel has beautiful windows.

The other chapels were added in the course of the next half-century, but authorities differ as to their order and dates. One of the first must necessarily have been that of St. Mary Magdalene, erected by Tebaldo Pontano, Bishop of Assisi, who died in 1329 and may have completed his chapel ten years before his death. It is decorated with scenes from the life of the Magdalene—who is here, as elsewhere, identified with the sister of Lazarus—in a series of frescoes often attributed to Giotto on the assumption that he returned to Assisi about the year 1318, which is doubtful. The vigorous dramatic life in the scene of the "Raising of Lazarus," the poetic grace of the beautiful "Noli Me Tangere," the admirable portrait of Bishop Pontano on his knees before his saintly predecessor, S. Rufino, have been as oft belittled as belauded, according as they are considered to be authentic works of Giotto or weak imitations of his masterpieces at Padua. They are surely simpler and stronger, though possibly less accomplished, than the later

frescoes of the Chapel of St. Nicholas. Meanwhile, another Florentine, perhaps "Maso," had painted a most beautiful "Coronation of the Virgin" under the arch of the Tribune opposite, with a miracle and the death of St. Stanislaus and a small Crucifixion—the latter one of the loveliest little pictures in the church. In all these we see the influence of Giotto.

For our theme is the greatness of Giotto in its relation to the greatness of St. Francis, and they help to explain each other. The power of the great artist lay in his direct expression of the life around him, just as the supreme power of the saint in the direct expression of the life within. Giotto, like Francis, with unerring insight chose that great moment in each act that summed up its true significance and expressed its full intensity, thus doing for painting what Francis did for faith; he found it almost static and symbolic, made it vital and dynamic, framed its art-speech for at least a hundred years.

IV

With regard to the four other chapels leading out of the nave, some say that they were all built by testamentary provision of the Cardinal Gentile da Montefiore, who died in the year 1312, others that he provided only for the Chapel of St. Martin, and possibly that of St. Stephen, immediately facing it—once dedicated to St. Louis of France, or St. Louis of Toulouse, or both; here also critics differ. The Chapel of St. Anthony of Padua, between the latter and that of St. Mary Magdalene, may be a little later. In all these chapels, as in that of St. Andrew, afterwards dedicated to St. Peter of Alcantara, built in beside the campanile, the stained-glass windows are great harmonies of brilliant colour, a mine of interest for anyone with sight and patience to examine them. But their frescoes were destroyed within two centuries of their painting by damp or, in one case, the collapse of a roof—except in the Chapel of St. Martin, where the story of that soldier saint is exquisitely painted by the hand of Simone Martini of Siena, —one of the only traditional attributions in the Church that, as far as we know, still remains uncontested.

The same artist, or a follower, possibly his brother Donato, painted in the right transept a series of half-length figures of saints, often misnamed; they are described in the latest guide-books as being the portraits of St. Francis, St. Louis

of Toulouse, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Delfine and her husband, St. Eleazar of Sabran; then on the next wall the Madonna and Child between St. Louis of France and the Blessed Queen Blanche, his mother: the only difficulty here is that St. Eleazar died in 1323 and St. Delphine over forty years later, and that they were canonized together in 1369, whereas Prof. Supino says that the frescoes were painted by Simone Martini between the years 1318 and 1320! The last figure in the corner may possibly be S. Ansano, patron saint of Siena, but the beautiful woman that once was thought to be St. Clare, and afterwards pronounced to be a great lady of the Third Order, must, we fear, remain the "Bella Incognita" until another critic shall find her a new name.

There is no more fascinating diversion from the more serious task of considering the authorship of the frescoes than to weigh the identity of the unknown saints among the many holy claimants. The Fair Unknown seems to be carrying a bosomful of alms for the poor, for her left hand is clasped tightly on the folds of her garment, while her right, holding a wand, is lightly pressed in support of the load. This attitude at once suggests St. Elizabeth of Hungary, carrying the loaves which were changed to roses. The "Queen" beside her then might be the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia, the royal correspondent of St. Clare, if she be not St. Catherine of Alexandria, patroness of princes, holding out her ringed finger towards the Holy Child.

In about the same position in the left transept, another Sienese, probably Pietro Lorenzetti, painted an extremely beautiful Madonna between St. Francis and St. John the Evangelist. She is pointing the former out to the Child, Who seems to be telling her all the great deeds that the saint will do. It is exquisitely painted on a gold background, and the faces have the same sweet, languid sadness, the long, delicate features and soft almond eyes, as those by Simone Martini, which we have just described.

On the walls and barrel roof of this left transept are a series of scenes from the Life of Christ, twelve in all, including a great Crucifixion. It is said that they are all by Pietro Lorenzetti and his pupils, albeit varying greatly both in execution and in feeling. The Descent from the Cross on the end wall, in spite of the emaciation of the Sacred Body, has almost the life and power of the school of Giotto, though the faces resemble those of the saints in the neighbouring Crucifixion. The stiff-

ness of the dead limbs, the energy of the disciples and passionate sorrow of the despairing women, with the solemnity of the great Cross standing out alone against the sombre sky and dominating the simple composition, combine to produce a sense of tragedy, which all the skilful virtuosity and delicate detail of the surrounding frescoes fail to give.

For it must be obvious to anyone who has considered these pictures, and especially those of Simone Martini in the Chapel of St. Martin, that the aims and ideals, as well as the forms and colours, of the Sienese painters are quite other than those of Giotto and his school. Giotto's figures are sturdy with limbs rounded in relief, the faces animated, the garments full, plain and heavy, the colours simple, strong and vivid ; whereas the figures of the Sienese are elongated and graceful, the faces dreamy, the draperies fluent, clinging and richly embroidered, the colours subtle, blending and iridescent. Moreover, the compositions of Giotto are simple with economy of expressive figures and few, undecorated buildings to indicate the scene. The pictures of the Sienese are filled with irrelevant and often vulgar detail, so that the eye longs for space wherein to rest. The splendid breadth of Giotto's " Life of Francis " or of his great works in the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene contrasts with the restlessness of the " Life of Christ " upon these barrel vaults ; as, for example, in the elaborate hexagonal pavilion which is the scene of the " Last Supper " with the trivial by-play of the washing of the plates, or the almost irreverent picture of the " Flagellation " within an over-decorated loggia, upon the roof of which skips a monkey on a string ! These scenes are utterly at variance with the Franciscan spirit, the essence of which was a simplifying and deepening of emotional life.

It might not be too fanciful to say that these two schools of painters reflect the life of the cities of their origin—the Florentine the broad humanity, the purposeful activity of the great Guelf merchant-city, the Sienese the pretty courtesy of aristocratic Ghibellinism. Simone Martini in the Chapel of St. Martin exalts not humanity, but chivalry ; the glamour of the Imperial court, the glitter of military life, the ceremonial dignity of episcopal death inspire him. With all his dreamy sweetness, he is the courtly painter of the pomps and vanities, commissioned by a great prince or prelate to exalt the saints of his house in the sanctuary of their celestial patron. His

work is worldly, decorative and self-conscious, though peerless in technical skill and soft romantic charm; but it possesses little of that strength, sincerity and depth of feeling that inform the work of Giotto and stamp it as the true expression of Franciscanism in Art.

CHAPTER XI

The Strife in the Order—The Fraticelli—The "Legends" of St. Francis—Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure—"The Apocryphal Gospels"—The "Speculum Perfectionis"—"The Little Flowers."

I

IT often happens that History is unjust to Authority for no better reason than that it has less cause and less leisure to defend itself than has Opposition to attack. Also, the world forgets the good it has absorbed and ignores the perils that have been averted. There is much in the inspiration of St. Francis that attracts us by its originality, much that at the outset contributed to apostolic ardour, which was abandoned because it hampered apostolic work; much also that the older Orders had practised and discarded, not always from worldly motives. If it needed an act of faith to embrace heroic poverty, it also needed faith to put it by, as not essential, and sometimes not expedient for the greater purpose,—that of evangelization. It was surely right that this great world-wide Order should welcome and embrace all sorts and conditions, and with far-sighted comprehension provide for considerable diversity in the observance of the Rule. For the men of action was the apostolic life of ministry in populous cities, with some inevitable concessions to the exigencies of their ministry; for the natural contemplatives, the more ascetic life of hermitages, and for all, as Francis willed and practised, the constant alternation of the two. At first, the division was a matter of convenience, not conviction; those friars who were gathered into communities of twelve or more were termed "Conventuals," and necessarily had certain mitigations of the Rule, owing to the impossibility of so many persons living from hand to mouth, "at the Lord's Table." But in all the life remained simple, if secured.

But from the earliest days there were fanatics in the Order, who, being mediævally-minded, were unable to grasp its

meaning; who clung to the contemplative hermit life, which St. Francis held subordinate, and the literal interpretation of the Rule of Poverty, which he intended in a spiritual sense. These Rigourists resented all restrictions on their wandering and denounced all mitigations whatsoever. For them the Rule was absolute, intangible, divine;—the interpretation set upon it by Gregory IX in his Bull "Quo Elongati" was anathema, notwithstanding the approval of St. Anthony; the privileges and dispensations obtained by Elias, and still more by his immediate successors, Albert of Pisa, Aymon and Crescentius, were detested, albeit framed for larger fields of work; even the decretal of Nicholas III, "Exit Qui Seminat," which returned to a stricter reading, was violently denounced by their leader, Peter John Olivi, because it indicated a way whereby the necessary business of the friars could be carried on by agents. The exaltation of St. Francis into perfect conformity with Christ was followed by a worship of the Rule, not as a guide and means to life, but as the very Ark of the Covenant, which no man, least of all a Pope, might touch without the doom of Uzziah!

Already in the days of John of Parma, among the Zealots of the hermitages, little circles of mystical unorthodoxy were beginning to spring up, holding strange apocalyptic doctrines; then the ignis fatuus of Joachism led the mystics into heresy and the tremulous hand of Celestine beckoned them into secession.

From this time forward there was a division in the Order, which diverted from the central issue many saintly men, such as Conrad of Offida and Angelo Clareno; deprived of the leaven of the more spiritual Brothers the larger convents, in constant contact with, and thus in greater peril from, the world; excluded from the steadying influence of the crowd the lonely hermitages, in greater mystic danger from the Devil; and encouraged the rebellious, the undisciplined and fanatical in a revolt that eventually led their polemical obstinacy and misguided mysticism into heresies, horrible immoralities, and in some cases to the stake! To mark their secession they adopted a special dress, discarding the long loose habit and clothing themselves only in a tight, short garment, barely sufficient to cover their nakedness. It is asserted that whenever they were given food they ate it immediately, taking the birds and animals for their example and condemning wallets,

equally with granaries and cellars, as a wicked distrust of Providence! Thus they forget "the salt of measure" that St. Francis recommended and the due avoidance of singularity which he called "a precipice."

Not that we would in any wise depreciate those great spiritual privileges which saintly mediæval men so often sought, and with indomitable heroism! Their rewards, their visions and transports we can neither question nor conceive. But it is by their fruits that we are compelled to weigh them, and in the other scale, the works of the great saints. How far was the asceticism justified, which seems so barren, save of bitterness, and suggests that these spiritual Brothers were deliberately trying to win by force those mystical rewards?

For mysticism is dangerous, if not strictly disciplined; it opens the soul to God or to the Devil. The horrid practices of the "Fraticelli," the unreadable records of the movements led by Fra Segarelli and Fra Dolcino, to name but two notorious examples, are among the strongest arguments for diabolical possession that history can produce. The prophetic works of Joachim of Flores were interpreted to imply a denial of the Sacraments and the supersession of the Catholic Hierarchy and the Scriptures by the Spiritual Franciscans and their favourite books. A step further brought unhappy brethren from the "Freedom of the Spirit" to the "Freedom of the Flesh" and the preaching and practice of orgies of "Free Love," —customs which they endeavoured to spread over the world and defended in armed revolt against the law! If such men claimed to be descended from St. Francis, it can only have been through the heretical generation of Zealots who held that "their life was the life of Christ" and that therefore no superior had power to alter it, who, dwelling in isolated caves and eyries, based their exaggerated sacrifices on an exaggerated notion of their heavenly importance, without a thought for their human usefulness. They were persecuted, they were driven from convent to convent, they were most harshly dealt with; but there is no denying that the Devil got into the Order by the door of their obstinate disobedience.

When the hopes raised by Celestine were disappointed by his fall, the "Spirituals" refused to rest content. Pope after Pope endeavoured to close the schism, Boniface VIII and John XXII by persecution, Clement V rather by compromise. But of the wider political struggles which coincided and

coalesced with these dissensions during the tempestuous pontificate of John XXII—when the Pope and a General Council were at odds concerning the poverty of Christ and His Apostles, and the Order was divided into no fewer than four parties—we have no cause to write. Suffice it to note that there was a moment, when not only were a number of "Spirituals" taking part with the German Emperor, Louis of Bavaria, against the Papacy, but an excommunicated Minister-General was also in opposition and a Conventual Friar Minor, Peter of Corvara, was actually reigning at Rome as Anti-Pope! To such a scandalous state of affairs had the struggle for Poverty led!

Olivi's disciples, Ubertino of Casale and Angelo of Clareno, wrote books,—the one, the "Arbor Vitæ Crucifixæ Jesu," the other the "Historia Septem Tribulationum," and both directed against their superiors. Meanwhile, their nameless disciples also wrote or put together many other writings. Far away from the busy world of the great conventual institutions, in the seclusion of the mountain hermitages of Umbria or the Marches, they might well look back and reconstruct the early years of the Order, seen through a distant legendary haze, with the tints of disappointment, disillusion and regret. They had certainly infinite leisure.

II

Reading the older authorities one would never suspect the existence of two hostile parties in the Order during the lifetime of St. Francis. Thomas of Celano, writing just after his death, would appear to know nothing of them; his praise of the work of the great Vicar-General Elias and of the inner circle of the Companions, Leo, Masseo, Rufino, Angelo and Illuminato, is cordial, candid and sincere,—for although he does not mention these last by name, it could not have been more difficult for a Brother in those days to identify them from his descriptions than it is for us to-day. It is not probable that he knew St. Francis very intimately, seeing that he had passed many years attached to the German mission; on the other hand, he was surrounded by all the most constant companions, with whose help his admirable and convincing work was obviously compiled. So satisfactory was it to those who had known Francis that for some eighteen years no one seems to have seen the need of adding to it. In 1244, however, Minister-General

Crescentius addressed from the Chapter-General held at Genoa an encyclical letter bidding all the Brethren send in reports of what they knew of the miracles and wonders of the Founder's life. Among the memoirs that his behest produced was a book, or fragment of a book, now known as the "Legend of the Three Companions," in the main a story of St. Francis's youth and conversion with a brief account of his death and burial, entirely "uncontroversial" and approving the official policy. Next, still at Crescentius' command, Thomas of Celano composed his "Second Life," using this Legend or its sources, and other memoirs as well. This time he naturally makes no mention of Elias; at the same time he gives no hint of dissensions. He tells us that there were certain brothers who were inclined to separate themselves and go off alone in disobedience and that St. Francis saw a devil on the shoulder of a brother who would not obey his Vicar, that is, Elias. This can only be read as a warning. In 1250 John of Parma ordered him to prepare a "Treatise upon the Miracles," which proves that he too approved of the former work of the "official biographer of the Order." Finally, at the order of Innocent IV he writes the Life of St. Clare. In 1260 St. Bonaventure was invited by the Chapter of Narbonne to compose his "Greater Legend," which he accomplished with such truth and skill that all other lives were held to be superfluous. Few biographies indeed before the eighteenth century have been written with so much care for original testimony as these four of St. Francis; yet in not one of them is there a suggestion of strife within the Order, during the life of the saint.

But from the little hermitages of Umbria and the Marches, in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, there emerged certain anonymous anthologies, Apocryphal Gospels of St. Francis, such as the "Speculum Perfectionis," said to consist partly of writings left by Brother Leo, and the "Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Ejus," Latin original of that exquisite book, the "Fioretti" or "The Little Flowers of St. Francis," generally thought to be the work of several hands. Both books contain many episodes of his intimate life, which are true, beautiful and edifying, and such as only a close companion could supply; both, on the other hand, contain other stories of an inferior quality altogether, showing the saint in a harsher light with a certain narrowness of outlook, of which the earlier Lives by Thomas of Celano, the "Three Companions," and St.

Bonaventure had afforded no example. These stories are generally what to-day is called "tendencious," that is, told with a purpose—in this case, the exaltation of the extremest form of poverty and the denigration of the character and policy of Elias, as conceived by the malcontents of the third generation. Evidently earlier and authentic records are included in these collections, though edited by a much later and by no means impartial hand, with modifications and interpolations calculated to support definite political views.

For example, the "Speculum Perfectionis" begins with that marvellous exaltation of the Rule by a miracle, which in itself is difficult to conceive; nothing less than the actual Voice of Christ Himself speaking out of Heaven in such a way that not only St. Francis, but a number of bystanders heard it; speaking, almost with passion, in answer to a question addressed to Him by Francis, and declaring that He alone was the Author of the Rule and that the man who would not obey it should straightway leave the Order!

The account of this amazing miracle is followed by some twenty-four chapters giving examples of St. Francis's insistence upon poverty: for instance, how he taught that a friar should possess no more than a habit, a cord and breeches; that he should not have books, or only few and poor; how he wished that the convents should be made only of wattle and mud, albeit we know that he died in a stone building; how he would have *all* the Brothers beg—a shrewd hit at the ecclesiastics!—but no one take thought for the morrow, not even so much as by putting dried beans to soak in water overnight. Many of the incidents had already been told by Thomas of Celano; many are truly characteristic. Then, after instances of his charity and compassion, we find sections upon his holy humility and obedience, although here we have put into the saint's mouth bitter complaints against the learned friars and Prelates who would change the Order, who would impose a Rule like that of St. Benedict or St. Augustine, together with fierce predictions that learning would be its ruin!

Next, attached to the seventy-first chapter is a writing, which Leo is said to have given to Brother Conrad of Offida, purporting to contain a verbatim report of a conversation that St. Francis held with Christ; we quote in full. We are told that the holy Father was standing in prayer near Assisi

behind the altar of the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, lifting up his hands on high to Christ that He should have mercy on the people in the great tribulation which must needs come.

"And the Lord said, 'Francis, if thou wouldst that I should have mercy on the Christian people, do this for Me, that thy Order may remain in the state in which it was placed, because out of the whole world there will remain nothing more than this of Me; and I promise thee, for the love of thee and of thine Order, I will not permit the world to suffer any tribulation. But I say unto thee, that they must needs go back from the way in which I have placed them and they will provoke Me to such wrath that I shall rise against them and I shall call the demons and I shall give them the power which they have desired over them, and shall place such a scandal between them and the world that there will be no one to wear thy habit except in the woods. And when the world loses faith there will not remain any other light except that of thine Order, because I have placed them for a light to the world.' And St. Francis asked, 'On what shall my brethren live who shall dwell in the woods?' And Christ said, 'I will feed them as I fed the sons of Israel, with manna in the desert, because they will be like them, and then shall they return to the first state in which thy Order was founded and begun.'"

Surely this writing gives a true picture of the mental attitude of the Zealots of the third generation, the Brethren who dwelt in the little hermitages, awaiting the ruin of the world. How many sectaries before them and after them have been inspired by the same spirit, the crude belief that they alone were the holy ones, who would be persecuted, driven into desert places, but fed with manna, for they alone were the light of the world, the chosen people for whose sake the Lord would spare mankind! And this narrow, bitter, and uncharitable vaunt was put into the mouth of the lowly Poverello, and was said to be transmitted by his favourite, Brother Leo!

The book goes on to report how St. Francis railed against those friars "puffed up with the wind of science and the vain speeches of their wisdom, who say that the truth is falsehood and like blind men persecute cruelly those who walk in light —who with their opinions shall be plunged into outer darkness together with the spirits of darkness,"—and so on for several chapters we have a very different Francis, preaching by precept rather than example, railing, admonishing, commanding and denouncing;—evidently all the work of another hand. Towards the end again we have more chapters of great spiritual

beauty, telling of Francis's love of the creatures, of the " Praise " he made for them and of many precious episodes of the last years of his life.

Besides this harshness in the tone, which makes it impossible to accept the book as an unprejudiced authority upon St. Francis, there are many internal signs that it was written long after the first generation of his Sons had passed away. The deaths of several of them are referred to. St. Francis's description of " the Perfect Friar " with its eulogy of the chief virtues of ten of them excludes any of those mentioned, —especially Leo, commended for his simplicity and most holy purity,—from having any hand in it. One can say that such passages are " interpolations " ; but such interpolations form the chief part of the book ! Finally, if truly this work could claim the authority of Leo, how is it that the " Spiritual Party " ever left such a strong point in doubt ?

III

As for the " Fioretti," how describe a book which is and has been for centuries an inexhaustible fount of spiritual delight ? To it we owe not only many of our most intimate and characteristic stories of St. Francis, but also almost the whole of our acquaintance with the beloved company of his Companions. The work is a poem so appealing that we must be the more shy of trusting it in matters of history and portraiture. As a romance it had to contain both a villain and a clown, to give due shadow and relief to its idyllic saints. Its villain is inevitably Elias, " the Apostate," and its clown as inevitably Juniper ; neither of these portraits is historical.

The greatness of Elias lies in worlds that are essentially unpoetical and naturally any poet would resent the intrusion of that strong embodiment of the spirit of organization into the exquisite waywardness of his spiritual romance. When an Angel, disguised as a fair youth apparelled for a journey, knocks on the gate of the Portiuncula desiring to ask a question of Elias, " because he is very wise," that " proud friar " at first refuses to be disturbed, and finally, being " ordered to go," goes in a " fury " and flinging open the door with violence demands of the youth his business. (With his mind full of the many letters he was doubtless writing, how should he guess it was an Angel ?) The latter asks him—what were really rather impertinent questions for a stranger, though very

important for the community—why he had stopped the friars eating meat and given other orders contrary to evangelical liberty? So Elias slams the door and goes back to his work, only to be most sternly rebuked by St. Francis, who prophesies that he will die outside the Order!

The tragedy of Elias is in that story! When have the simple men—those who know Angels when they see them—ever been able to understand the irritability of a Superior interrupted at his administrative labours? Think of Elias, controlling that vast Order, numbering many thousands, as well as all the convents of "Poor Ladies,"—struggling to bring some worldly sense into inconsequent enthusiasm, some discipline into the unruly rabble, consisting largely of ignorant visionaries, half-converted heretics, and unworthy hangers-on,—suddenly confronted by an "Angel" with the evident intention of engaging him in a lengthy and unprofitable discussion! It is the clash of the two worlds—the one of dreams, the other of hard facts, of licences, leases, and diplomatic letters, of admonitions, exhortations, judgments, counsels, policies, for Provincials, Guardians, Abbesses in a score of lands and climes! The authors of the "Little Flowers" are on the side of "the Angels," in whose company the organizer has very little chance!

Yet the tale how Francis knew that his great Vicar would be damned, since he was to become a renegade and die outside the Order, is not told so much with bitterness against Elias, as rather with a childlike fatalism and compassion. Pressed by Elias to say why he avoids him, Francis replies by confessing to him this knowledge, whereupon Elias with great devotion and many tears begs the saint to pray for him, for he knows he is indeed a dreadful sinner! So when Elias comes to die, "he that was reputed one of the wisest men in the world," his soul was saved by the merit of St. Francis and the prayers wherein he had placed hope so great!

As for Brother Juniper, we know from Thomas of Celano that he was a most eloquent preacher, a "hurler of fiery darts" of glowing words, not at all like the hopeless simpleton that the "Fioretti" story of his fortnight's cooking would imply. That, and the revolting story of his cruelty to a pig; the tale of what he would have done with the skull of his dead friend Amazialbene, and that of his escape from the gallows, are all fairy-stories, whereby we take the measure, not of this fervent priest

and seer, but of the humour of the early Franciscan sermon. Juniper was a great preacher, a great mystic and a tower of strength to St. Clare upon her deathbed ; he may owe his fame as a fool to his curious name and his fun to the legends of other saints before him.

In short, the " Fioretti " should be read, like the " Speculum Perfectionis," for their literary charm and the insight they afford into the life and times of their composing. Still greater caution must be used with the still later Chronicles, such as that of the " Four-and-Twenty Generals," written by Arnaldo da Serrano about 1365, one of the chief authorities for the subsequent lives of the First Companions, and the " Speculum Vitæ Beati Francisci," with its story of Leo and the Broken Bowl, composed about the same time by Fabian of Hungary. For the purposes of history we have the older legends : the first Life by Thomas of Celano, written immediately after the saint's death and accepted by the unanimous approval of the earliest witnesses ; the Legend of the Three Companions, Leo, Rufino and Angelo, in consultation with Masseo, Illuminato and others, fragmentary, even spurious, though it may be ; the second Life of Thomas of Celano, based on this with other matter ; and finally the " Greater Legend " of St. Bonaventure, embracing them all and much more matter which that wise and holy scholar was able to collect with the authority of his position as Minister-General of the Order at a time when nearly all the witnesses were still alive. These works are the pure gold of the Franciscan story.

CHAPTER XII

The Influence of Franciscan Outlook upon Life—Franciscan Music —Poetry—Dante and His Canto upon St. Francis.

1

IT is difficult to overestimate the influence of the friars' preaching upon the development of the Italian language ; but inasmuch as their custom was to address themselves to the poor and ignorant in the vernacular, rather than to imitate the Latin homilies of the Bishops, the sermons and songs of these natives of Central Italy cannot have been without effect in establishing whatever homogeneity there may have been in that " Lingua Aulica " which Dante found to be comprehended in all the " courts " of the Peninsula, and which gradually became more and more Tuscanized under the influence of the great literature of the Florentines.

But far deeper than this was the social, the educative influence of these wanderers, who were directly interested in Nature, human and divine ; who put off the shackles of property, and cultivated personality ; who depended for their living upon the sympathy they excited, and for their conversions upon the persuasiveness with which they put their case. Human nature and the Gospel stories were their material stock in trade, and their whole life was experience and practice in their art. As beggars, minstrels—popular entertainers —they worked on human character and translated hieratic doctrine into terms of sentiment. As confessors, directors, teachers and diplomatists, they were unrivalled ; it is little wonder if their genial wisdom occasionally degenerated into worldliness, while their conspicuous success made them a target for innumerable slanders. Their approach to life, in all its manifestations—Art, Literature, Science, Philosophy, Politics, or ordinary social affairs—was warmed by their ardent love of God and of all things created. It implied a realism almost modern in its patient and scrupulous observation, and

in its freedom from mediæval prejudice and superstitious fear. It is therefore as natural that the great forerunner of modern science, Roger Bacon, should have been a Friar Minor, as that Giotto should have been a Tertiary; and to these may be added Raymond Lully, the "illuminated doctor," Nicholas de Lira, the exegesist, and many others. In order that man should be taught to examine and study "unregenerate" nature directly, it needed that glow of fraternal love and the sympathy with which the followers of St. Francis regarded the Creation. Gradually the mediæval "Bestiaries," with their legendary animals, gave way to serious zoology; botany, medicine, and chemistry were born; it is not for nothing that Franciscans, even as early as Elias, were popularly held to be alchemists. Their missionaries to the ends of the known world found ethnology so interesting that they gave up the old travellers' fables of two-headed men, and thus it is no mere coincidence that the great discoverer who, in the faith that sea would be always sea, first pushed on across the ocean until he discovered the New World, should have been a Franciscan Tertiary. It was also largely to the great Franciscans that Dante owed that wealth of science, based on observation, which contributed so richly to his poem.

Again, nothing endeared the earliest Franciscans to the mediæval crowd more than their music; during the following century it became the chief Franciscan art. We know how St. Francis would sing from the very outset of his mission; how one of his last acts was to institute a choir of brethren for his Canticle and how he died listening to their chanting. Thomas of Celano speaks of "the new song," "the mellifluous organs and the modulated voices" singing the spiritual hymns of joy at the great ceremony of the Canonization. The highest mystical reward that is mentioned as being accorded to St. Clare was that of being transported in the spirit one Christmas night to the great Basilica to hear the chanting of the Friars and the tones of the great organ. Everywhere a Franciscan "place" was opened there was instituted a trained choir, and the simple aisleless churches with their wooden roofs were doubtless not indicated only by the vow of poverty, but also by their superior acoustic properties. In all Elias's schools teaching of music formed an important part, so that before long, Friars Minor were choirmasters at half the courts of Europe, as, for example, Giuliano of Spires at the court of

France, Henry of Pisa, Vita of Lucca and many others. John of Parma, the great "Spiritual" Minister-General, was, according to Salimbene, a fine musician. Music was peculiarly appropriate to the Franciscan spirit, as imitating directly the angelic praises and inspiring and expressing that mystic ardour which the friars imported into all common life.

It was only to be expected that the growing Order should gather into its ranks a great company of poets, of whom we can only mention the more noteworthy. The first was probably William of Lisciano, Brother Pacifico, crowned "King of Verses" by the Emperor Henry VI; then, most remarkable, John of Brienne, King of Jerusalem, a great warrior and statesman, and an excellent poet both in the French and the Sicilian tongues; then a certain Englishman, Brother Henry, author of the Latin versified legend of St. Francis, composed about the year 1230. Thomas of Celano must certainly be included in virtue of his splendid "Dies Iræ" and the versified Legend of St. Clare, and John of Peckham, Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury, also, in merit of his "Philomela," whether or no he can dispute with John of Parma and John Parenti the authorship of that exquisite prose allegory the "Sacrum Commercium Dominæ Paupertatis cum Sancto Patre Francisco." The author of the "Stabat Mater" was surely a true Franciscan, whether Jacopone or another, and Jacopone is one of the great mystic poets of the world. St. Bonaventure has left us charming hymns as well as prose books full of poetry, from which Dante certainly drew inspiration; while Brother Giacomino of Verona in his short rude epics in the vulgar tongue, "De Jerusalem Celesti" and "De Babilonia Civitate Infernali," possibly suggested ideas and artifices, as well as the subject of the "Divina Commedia." Finally may we not include among Franciscan poets the greatest singer of all time,

II

"Dante Alighieri,"—we are almost ashamed to write it on one of the last pages of this book, yet how could a book upon "Franciscan Italy" be complete without that mighty name? "No Francis, no Dante!" is surely a platitude, requiring neither proof nor explanation; though duly to trace their spiritual relationship would demand at least another volume.

That Dante was educated at the school of the friars at Sta. Croce, and buried in the habit of a Tertiary by the friars of

Ravenna, are matters of undisputed tradition. Than that he was spiritually a Son of Francis, few things can be surer. Far more even than Giotto in his painting, Dante exalts or creates humanity in every line of his great poem, freeing the human spirit from the trappings of convention, giving the world in instantaneous spiritual revelation, not merely a saint, a prince, a baron, or a robber, but a brother soul. Francesca, Ser Brunetto, Pier della Vigna; Manfred, Buonconte, Sordello and Sapia; Folco, Piccarda, Cacciaguida and so many more are shown by their self-revealing courtesy, albeit they are drawn in a few lines; and if there be others, such as Farinata, Ulysses and Justinian, who baffle us by their transcendent stature, they all alike contribute to our sympathetic experience and thus to our sense of brotherhood with mankind. Is not this especially St. Francis's inspiration? For the agent by which this work is achieved is Love.

Says the Poet in an oft-quoted passage of the "Purgatorio," "*io mi son un che quando Amor spira noto ed in quel modo Ch'ei detta dentro vo significando.*" To note when Love inspires and to express what He dictates,—what better account of St. Francis's method could be given? For thus noted and expressed the humblest thing attains eternal significance, becomes a symbol of Love himself, a revelation of God in the creature. Such was the lesson of St. Bonaventure; and what the "Seraphic Doctor" taught, Francis had acted all his life by direct inspiration and his true sons followed—blindly or wisely, according to the clearness of their intuition. So as Giotto opened the eyes of the world, Dante enlightened their intelligence—their intelligence of things unseen, but inspired, dictated and understood by Love.

For poets may be divided roughly into two classes,—those who use Nature for illustrating their own feelings, and those who enter so deeply by sympathetic intuition into the life of the creatures round them, that they feel with them, become one with them, through the insight of Love. There can be no question but that this last is the Franciscan secret, which was first breathed to the modern world by Francis when he entered into the lives of the creatures, recognized their virtues, their privileges and the bond of their Obedience to their Creator. So Dante when he sings of the lark, "that in the air expatiates, first singing and then silent for the last sweetness that satisfies her heart," or of the doves, "called by desire

and flying to their dear nest with open and folded wings across the sky," or of the cranes or of the beaver, or of many another creature going about the business of its life in its own way, invariably feels with it and promotes in us a sympathy, which is entirely in the Franciscan conception of the world. He has carried the lesson of Giotto a step further.

As for Dante's special learning, if he took his theology from St. Thomas, the ardent mysticism that transfuses it is of St. Bonaventure; while in matters of doctrine he surely promulgated that one most dear to the Franciscans, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, in favour of which the English Brothers and especially Duns Scotus and Richard of Middleton contended. No feature in his mighty poem is so conspicuous as his deep devotion to Our Lady, to whom he addresses through the mouth of St. Bernard some of his loveliest lines. Of St. Francis and the Franciscans he also writes in many places, as when the Seraphic Father comes to the death-bed of his spiritual son, Guido da Montefeltro, but is warned off by the demon, who points out that he died unshriven of mortal sin, or when he describes in a simile how the Brothers go travelling, walking singly in silent meditation across a solitary land. But the great tribute to St. Francis comes from the mouth of St. Thomas Aquinas in the Eleventh Canto of the "Paradiso," answered in the twelfth by St. Bonaventure in a corresponding eulogy of St. Dominic.

The famous canto opens with an appeal for recollection, an attack on the insensate folly of the sophistries and worldly cares, which keep men from the contemplation of the Divine. Around Beatrice and Dante in the Heaven of the Sun a wheel of twelve lights is revolving with ineffable music. The lights are the learned,—St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Solomon, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Dionysius, Boethius, Isidore, Paul Orosius, Bede, Richard of St. Victor, Sigier of Brabant, the first of whom has already spoken, introducing the rest. He now reads Dante's thoughts, occasioned by a somewhat cryptic remark upon his own Order, the Dominicans, and answers them by relating how Providence for the guidance of the Church raised up two Princes, to make her more secure and faithful to Himself, "the one being all seraphic in his ardour, the other by his wisdom a splendour of cherubic light." He briefly tells the story of the former, and the manner of his telling is extremely characteristic.

He begins by describing the birthplace, indicating it geographically by means of rivers, the Topino and Chiascio, the latter being the water which descends from the hill "chosen by St. Ubaldo," saintly Bishop of Gubbio. He places the city of Assisi on the fertile slope where especially the mountain breaks its steepness facing the Porta Sole, or Eastern Gate of Perugia, and indicates the second valley behind the hill "where Nocera weeps for the heavy yoke with Gualdo." Another description at once so terse, so precise and so suggestive to those who know the land, it would be difficult to conceive. Then Dante makes a play upon the name "Ascesi," as the city used to be called,—not "Ascent," but "Orient," as it should be called, since there was born a Sun, not actually, but as our sun may sometimes be said to be born from the Ganges, that is, the extreme east of the mediæval map.

Next, he fixes upon one distinctive feature of his subject and makes it the thread of his whole tale. The most poetic feature of the life of St. Francis is his mystical marriage with Poverty, the description of which is to be found in the "Sacrum Commercium," in the "Laude" of Jacopone da Todi, in the eulogy of her by St. Francis in the "Fioretti" or in the well-known fresco at Assisi. Following the description of her long widowhood and of their espousals at the time of his Renunciation, he tells of the eager coming of the First Companions, Bernard, Giles, Sylvester; the attainment of "the first seal" upon the Rule from Innocent; its confirmation by Honorius; the preaching to the Sultan of Egypt; the stigmata, "the final seal," upon the harsh rock of Alvernia; the saint's last commendation of his Lady to his followers, and his death upon her bosom. It is a perfect Life of Francis told in some eight pictures worthy to rank with the noblest that Giotto gave us, of whose manner its dramatic power and eloquent reserve remind us, the essential figures being, like his, strongly drawn, and informed with feeling and purpose.

The speech of the Angelic Doctor closes with a note of censure, not on the followers of St. Francis, but on those of St. Dominic, his own Order. In the next canto it is the turn of St. Bonaventure, who comes with another circle of lights, which encloses the first as in a second rainbow, parallel and like in colour, with motion for motion and song for song. He tells the story of St. Dominic, "the sacred athlete, kindly to his own and cruel to his foes"; describing first his birthplace, his

parents, his espousals with Faith at the baptismal Font, when a star was seen upon his forehead, and finally the foundation and might of his Order. St. Bonaventure concludes with a rebuke to the Franciscans, declaring that they were quite turned backward out of their Founder's steps, and though allowing some might yet be seen of whom it could be said they were as they were once, yet " would such not be found either with him of Casale, nor him of Acquasparta, whence to the Rule come those that would elude and those that would narrow it." From Casale came Ubertino, the restless spiritual, author of a book, the " Arbor Vitæ Crucifixæ," who eventually left the Order ; from Acquasparta, Cardinal Matteo, a worldly Minister-General, Legate of Boniface VIII and Dante's particular foe. With neither of these extremes does the poet hold, for he stands with St. Bonaventure, of whose " middle way " and holy charm we have already told. He truly declares that in great offices he ever placed the temporal part behind the spiritual and concludes his speech with a ceremonial presentation of all the great lights that have come with him, moved by the impassioned courtesy of Brother Thomas and his eloquent discourse. Among them are the Franciscans, Illuminato and Agostino, then Hugh of St. Victor, Peter the Spaniard, Nathan the Prophet, Donatus the Grammarian, St. John Chrysostom and St. Anselm, and last, but not least important for our story, the Calabrian Abbot Joachim, endowed, says Bonaventure, with the spirit of prophecy. The last point is particularly pleasing, in view of the reported persecution of the Joachists by the saintly Minister-General of the Order.

Such is the verdict of Dante upon the Franciscan quarrel : the middle way, the human and the Catholic ; with which conclusion we may rest content.

CHAPTER XIII

The Subsequent History of the Order—The Blessed Paolo Trinci—"The Observants"—S. Bernardino of Siena—The Order as it is To-day.

IN 1303, with the outrage of Anagni and the death of Boniface, ended the century of Papal greatness, which opened with the accession of Innocent III in 1198. There followed the long "Babylonish Captivity" of the Popes at Avignon and then the scandal of the Schism. In 1321, with the death of Dante, closed the earliest or mediæval period of Italian poetry, which began a century before with St. Francis's Canticle and the first love-songs of the Sicilian School. With the death of Giotto in 1337 the era of development in Art, which we study at Assisi, may be said to have reached its culmination, for by that time all the best works of his school, as well as those of the Sienese Masters, in the Churches of St. Francesco, were completed. In the same year, 1337, died Angelo Clareno, the last of the protagonists in the early quarrels of the Order; the Franciscan movement as an original spring of inspiration had already spent its force. This date may therefore terminate our period of "Franciscan Italy." All that remains is briefly to review the subsequent history of the Order and to indicate the changes whereby the present came to be.

Towards the middle of the fourteenth century, when all the leaders of the earlier divisions were long dead, the true ancestor of the modern "Observants," the Blessed Paolo Trinci, scion of the ruling family of Foligno, with the permission of his superiors gathered around him under the banner of the "Strict Observance" a small community of like-minded men at the little hermitage of Brugliano in the beautiful valley that leads up from his native town towards Camerino. "Paoluccio," as he was called, and his immediate followers were "simple men" and laymen, which emphasizes once

more in the unity of the Order where the chief danger-line of cleavage lay.

Paoluccio did good service to the " Conventuals," that is, the official Order, by preaching against the remnant of the Fraticelli, and causing their exile from Perugia, where they had become particularly obnoxious to the hierarchy. In gratitude the Conventuals gave him a number of hermitages and authorized him and his rapidly-spreading family to stay in any of the convents of the province, an act which proves that they were quite ready to countenance the Strict Observance, provided it was unaccompanied by denunciation of authority. The cell of the Blessed Paoluccio is still shown as one of the sacred associations of the Carceri. He died at the end of the fourteenth century, blind, full of years, of grace and charity—an exquisite figure, on whose life we would willingly dwell longer. The story of the old saint preparing for his last journey and groping round his little convent at Brugliano to kiss the stones farewell, is surely quite in the Franciscan spirit.

His place was taken by John of Stroncone, and afterwards by St. John of Capistrano. Pope Martin V particularly favoured the Observants and used them against the Extremists. In 1415, with the consent of the Conventuals, they were given the care of the Portiuncula ; in 1420, of the sacred mountain of Alvernia ; in 1434, of the Palestinian convents ; for a while it is certain that they drew to themselves all the more saintly friars of the Order. But strife broke out in the Ultramontane provinces, and early in the fifteenth century the communities of Strict Observance were given their own Vicars, first abroad, soon afterwards in Italy, the first Italian Vicar being S. Bernardino of Siena.

Of S. Bernardino and how as a youth he nursed the plague-stricken Sienese, how he entered the Order and was given the hermitage of " La Capriola," how he preached through all the cities of Italy, causing great " revivals," how he healed feuds, stopped blasphemy and gambling, assisted debtors to gain freedom, and caused vast bonfires of " vanities " to be made ; how he attracted crowds by means of clever symbolism and, in particular, carried the sacred Monogram of Christ upon a board until he was accused of founding a new cult ; how triumphantly he put his foes into the wrong and was commended by the Pope, beloved by an Emperor and followed by vast crowds on all his journeys ; how finally he wore out his frame

by his excessive labours and laid it down at Aquila in the Abruzzi—all these are histories that we would gladly tell, did only space permit. But this most Franciscan saint belongs to a new era, the springtime of that sceptical, pagan Renaissance, when men found their Gospel in Plato rather than Joachim, and Franciscanism could cause no more than a temporary reaction. But a point to note in the career of S. Bernardino is that, while he was numbered among the Strict Observants and founded and ruled Observant convents, yet at each crisis in his life he looked to the Conventuals and sought and found support in the whole Order. Equally with his own disciples, the Conventuals were proud of him and his great popular success, and seem to have shown no jealousy, although owing to his influence the Observant convents multiplied quite disproportionately to their own, and drew from the schools of the Order and from the world the men of intellect and sanctity.

After S. Bernardino, the history of Franciscanism in Italy becomes of less distinctive interest to the world. We must perforce contract it into a few lines. Inspired by him and St. John of Capistrano, the adherents of the " Strict Observance " grew in strength and numbers and many convents were entrusted to them by the Conventual friars, and many more were founded in all parts of the world. Pope after Pope, as we have seen, continued the endeavour to draw all the friars into one united body, following the same observance in letter as in spirit ; Martin V, Eugenius IV, Calixtus III, and Sixtus IV in particular, the last-named being himself a Conventual and an ex-Minister-General of the Order. The compromise that Sixtus IV effected brought rest for a generation, but in the days of that warlike Pope, Julius II, strife broke out again.

Leo X in his turn aspired to be a peacemaker and in 1517 summoned to a Chapter-General at Rome both Conventuals and Observants, the latter including Clarenists, Collettans, Discalced, Hermits and Gospel-Brothers, each of whom claimed to follow the Rule precisely as St. Francis had intended. At the Chapter one and all declared themselves ready for any sacrifice—except that of their sacred principles, the Rule as each interpreted it ! The extremer men insisted on the abandonment of all property, the return to the conditions of times that were long past. The Conventuals saw no need for such a change. So Leo finally divided the Order into two

THE REFECTORY OF THE CARCERI

main sections, to be ruled henceforth under two separate Ministers-General—that of the Observants to have the seal and precedence, by reason of their greater numbers.

But every effort at uniformity invariably provokes division, since, owing to the variety of human nature, discussion as a process inevitably moves towards diversity, rather than towards unity of opinion. Only a few years later, in 1525, certain hermits of St. Francis sought and obtained permission to live apart, as they conceived the First Companions to have lived, in the most primitive conditions, to wear beards and habits with a peculiar type of cowl, from which they were subsequently known as Capuchins. The Conventuals and Observants both now lived in great convents; but the ideal of the Capuchins was at first to return to the original simple life, which experience proved to be only possible in little hermitages. The success of this branch during the following century caused it to be allowed a hierarchy with a Minister-General of its own.

Thus there are now three branches of the First Order of St. Francis. The Observants have to-day the largest numbers, though not a majority over the other two. Counting S. Bernardino and St. John of Capistrano, they have a glory of no less than nine-and-twenty saints and about fifty beatified members of their family. They guard the Holy Places in the Holy Land, as well as the Portiuncula, Mount Alvernia, Greccio, Fonte Colomba and other sacred shrines, while one of their branches, the Discalced, or Alcantarins, hold S. Damiano, the Chiesa Nuova or the house of Francis, and the hermitages of Monteluco and the Carceri. Their Minister-General resides in Rome at the convent of the Ara Cœli on the Capitol.

The Conventuals can boast one of the greatest saints of the seventeenth century—St. Joseph of Copertino, a most interesting figure and a great wonder-worker, especially famous for that curious power of floating about in the air. They also number many Venerables, four Popes and several Cardinals, as well as innumerable famous scholars. At Assisi they have charge of the Tomb of the Founder and the first home of the Order, that is, the hut of Rivo-Torto. Their Minister-General resides in Rome at the Church of the Holy Apostles.

The Capuchins at the time of the French Revolution were particularly strong in France, where they had no fewer than four hundred and twenty houses and over four thousand friars.

Great missionaries in heathen lands, they can boast many martyrs, as well as several famous saints, such as St. Laurence of Brindisi. Of Franciscan shrines they hold the Celle of Cortona and the mountain hermitage of Monte Casale. Their Minister-General lives in Rome at the Convent of the Immaculate Conception.

But all these branches are one Order of the Friars Minor, follow the Rule of Francis, albeit somewhat differently, cleave to the theology of Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure, hold in peculiar veneration the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and incline to the philosophy of Scotus rather than Aquinas.

Of the Second Order of St. Francis, the Clarisses, a very brief note must suffice. They also divided into various branches, following various reformers, the chief among them being, the Poor Clares, the Collettines, the Capucines and the Urbanistes, who correspond to the Conventuals. Altogether they have given to the world some twenty-two saints or beatified souls, and a large number of martyrs. Of Saints, besides St. Clare and her sister St. Agnes, the best known are the Blessed Isabella of France, sister of St. Louis, the Blessed Cunagonde, St. Colette of Corbie, St. Veronica Giuliani, who was stigmatized, and St. Jeanne de Valois. They live in extreme poverty, strictly enclosed, though some of the mitigated branches undertake the education of girls. Besides the large convent of Sta. Chiara, there are several other houses of the Order in Assisi.

The Third Order of St. Francis, the Order of Penitence, has been for over seven centuries a spiritual power in the secular world, the strength of which it is impossible to estimate. To it have belonged many of the greatest sovereigns, statesmen, poets, writers, scientists and men of action throughout history; sufficient be it to cite the names of King Louis IX, Ferdinand of Castile, John of Brienne, Robert of Naples, Dante, Petrarch, Giotto, Christopher Columbus. It has brought forth no fewer than eighty to ninety canonized saints and beatified souls, while its martyrs are beyond computation. Besides the two Kings, St. Louis of France and St. Ferdinand of Castile, and the four "Queens"—St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Elizabeth of Portugal, the Blessed Queen Blanche and the Blessed Agnes of Bohemia—one might instance St. Margaret of Cortona, St. Rose of Viterbo, St. Clare of Montefalco, Blessed Angela of Foligno,

St. Eleazar of Sabran and St. Delfine, his wife; St. Conrad of Noto, St. Ives of Brittany, St. Roch of Montpellier, St. Catherine of Bologna and many other famous and popular intercessors. The Order has various branches, regular and secular, some dwelling in convents devoted to pious work, others living entirely in the world. With its many ramifications through all classes of society, the Order did good service in the dissolution of the feudal tyrannies, the combating of heresies, the elevation of the poorer classes, and the pacification of civil strife.

So the great Order of St. Francis in its three main branches has carried its spiritual and its charitable work forward for perhaps a score of generations, constantly gathering into its ranks a host of men of peace and piety and everywhere fulfilling the most humble and ungrateful tasks. With occasionally a saint, a scholar or a great prelate in its company, it survived the many waves of thought and feeling, sweeping victoriously across the world. First came the Revival of Classical Learning with its return to Pagan morals and philosophic scepticism; then, with the new birth of thought, especially in northern Europe, the excesses at the time of the Reformation, with all its destruction of spiritual and artistic treasure; then the reaction of the Catholic Revival under the influence of new saints, such as Ignatius Loyola; the Rise of Nationalism; the great Liberal Movement of the last two centuries, coincident with the development of Science and its mechanical application to industry; the French Revolution with its secularization, and the pillage of the ensuing wars; and finally the Risorgimento, the making of a modern Italy with its confiscation of Church property and all the mad iconoclasm which accompanied this, as it accompanied all previous revolutions. In "Franciscan Italy" the destruction was but little inferior to that in England over three centuries before. In hundreds of desecrated churches venerable relics were scattered, without heed of the poor who loved them; in the abandoned cloisters frescoes were whitewashed over, or left to be a mark for the bayonets of illiterate recruits; illuminated manuscripts were tossed on to the barrows, to be cut to pieces for their vellum or their miniatures; thousands of rare volumes were disposed of as waste paper and pictures beyond count found their way across the sea. On the mountain slopes vast tracts of land belonging to the Orders were sold for a song

to unscrupulous speculators, who hacked down the forests to the ruin of the land. So that in Umbria, poor before, famine and want stalked visibly, as city after city became "dead."

But those who knew Umbria and especially Assisi towards the end of the last century can hardly conceive the change to-day. The cloud of false idealism seems to be passing with the corruption it engendered, and a new Italy is returning to the old sanctities in the spirit of patriotic sacrifice. The hills are being slowly reafforested, the libraries patiently regathered, the convents re-established, the processions renewed; for the people are securing their religious freedom from the organized tyranny of contemptuous Free Thought.

Living and spreading still is the Franciscan Tree, and bearing still, among occasional flowers of holiness, its own peculiar fruits in works of mercy; hospitals, asylums, orphanages, homes for the sick, the old, the halt, maimed, blind, dumb, the lepers; missions innumerable to the slum-dwellers of populous cities or to the heathen of distant lands. From Singapore to San Francisco, Inverness to Buenos Ayres, hundreds of thousands of unfortunate mortals are nursed and shriven, taught and comforted, by men and women girt with the Franciscan cord.

That the Order has changed—and doubtless changes—is no more than a sign of its spiritual vitality, while pressing out into new fields of work. It has adapted itself to life around, which is the first law of survival. Suffice that it has preserved intact the Gospel of its inspiration, of which we have endeavoured to set forward proofs. It was just the seeming lack of power to adapt herself to the new spiritual conditions, as the world of the growing towns emerged from the barbarism of the Middle Ages, that was the principal symptom of decay in the Church before St. Francis came.

But to-day, were signs of spiritual resurgence lacking anywhere in Italy, they were surely to be found in the Lower Church of S. Francesco, thronged as it is from dawn to dusk with the interminable pilgrims of the Holy Year. Already before sunrise you may see twelve priests saying their Mass at the twelve altars, and, kneeling on the steps before them, serried rows of eager worshippers, waiting their turn to receive the Sacrament. If the scenes at the "Perdono" were impressive and pathetic, these are intensely hopeful and inspiring. Never have crowds so dense or so devout been known in the

little city within the memory of living men. And will not the Centenary Year bring witness yet more eloquent that the Franciscan Gospel after seven centuries is living still—when millions of all nations will read, speak, preach or pray, using the name of Francis, and thousands flock from the four winds to his tomb in the dim crypt of his great church at Assisi?

TABLE OF DATES

1182 Francis, son of Pietro Bernardone, born in Assisi.

1198 Accession of Pope Innocent III. Destruction of German Seneschal's Castle by people of Assisi. War between Perugia and Assisi.

1202 Francis taken prisoner by the Perugians at Battle of Ponte San Giovanni.

1203 Truce with Perugia. Francis released.

1204 Illness of Francis.

1205 Francis sets out for campaign in Apulia, but turns back at Spoleto.

1206 Francis makes pilgrimage to Rome.

1207 Francis renounces the world. Rebuilds Chapel of S. Damiano.

1209 Francis, having completed the restoration of the Chapel of the Portiuncula, starts his apostolacy.

1210 Journey of First Brothers to Rome. Innocent III confirms their Rule.

1212 Francis receives the gift of the Portiuncula. The conversion of Clare.

1212–13 Francis takes ship to Syria, is shipwrecked and returns to Ancona. Receives at S. Leo gift of La Verna.

1213–14 Francis goes to Spain for Morocco, but is turned back by illness.

1214 Council of Lateran. Meeting of Francis and Dominic (?).

1216 Death of Innocent III at Perugia. Accession of Honorius III, from whom Francis obtains Indulgence of Portiuncula.

1218 Chapter at Portiuncula. Brother Elias sent to Syria.

1219 Francis goes to the East. (August) lands in Damietta. Interview with Sultan Malek-el-Kamil.

1220 (March) Francis goes to Syria. (June) Francis warned of critical state of Order, returns to Italy with Peter Cataneo, Elias and Cæsar of Spires. (September) obtains from Honorius a Cardinal Protector for Order.

1221 Francis ill with malaria. (March) Death of Peter Cataneo. Elias Vicar-General. (May) Chapter of Mats. First written Rule promulgated.

1222–23 Francis re-writes Rule at Fonte Colomba.

1223 (November) Pope Honorius confirms the Rule.

1224 Francis in Valley of Rieti. First mission of Franciscans to England. (September 14) Francis received Stigmata at La Verna.

1225 Francis writes Canticle of Brother Sun at S. Damiano.

1226 Francis ill at Rieti; carried to Siena, to Celle of Cortona. "Testament" of St. Francis. (September) Returns to Assisi. (October 4) Death of St. Francis.

1227 Death of Honorius. Election of Gregory IX. (May) Chapter at Portiuncula. John Parenti elected Minister-General.

1228 (March) Land for Church of S. Francesco acquired by Pope, who promotes building by indulgences. (July 16) Canonisation of St. Francis. Thomas of Celano writes First Life.

1230 Body of S. Francis transferred to Church of S. Francesco. Chapter-General in Assisi sends Mission to Pope regarding Rule. Bull "*Quo Elongati*."

1231 (June) Death of St. Anthony of Padua. (November) Death of St. Elisabeth of Hungary.

1232 Chapter-General at Rieti. Elias elected Minister-General. St. Anthony canonized.

1235 St. Elizabeth canonized.

1239 (April) Chapter-General at Rome. Fall of Elias. Albert of Pisa Minister-General (December) Elias joins Frederick II.

1240 Death of Albertof Pisa. Aymon of Faversham Minister-General.

1241 Battle of Meloria. Death of Gregory IX.

1243 Election of Innocent IV after two years' interregnum.

1244 Death of Aymon. Crescentius Minister-General. Brothers asked to supply Memoirs of St. Francis.

1245 Council of Lyons. Frederick II deposed. "Legend of the Three Companons." Second Life by Thomas of Celano.

1247 John of Parma, Minister-General.

1248 Imperial camp plundered at Vittoria.

1250 Death of Frederick II.

1253 Innocent IV returns to Italy. (April) Death of Elias at Cortona. Innocent IV consecrates the Upper Church. (August 11) Death of St. Clare.

1254 Publication in Paris of "Introduction to the Everlasting Gospel."

1255 Alexander IV canonizes St. Clare.

1257 Chapter-General at Ara Cœli. John of Parma resigns, Bonaventure Minister-General. Church of Sta. Chiara begun.
1260 (May) Chapter-General at Narbonne issues regulations about Franciscan Churches and invites Bonaventure to write Life of St. Francis.
1261 Death of the Blessed Giles.
1266 Chapter-General at Paris orders all legends of St. Francis, except that by Bonaventure, to be destroyed.
1271 Death of Brother Leo.
1273 Accession of Gregory X.
1274 Council at Lyons. Death of St. Bonaventure.
1279 Nicholas III issues Bull "*Exeat Qui Seminat*" explaining Rule.
1294 Election of Pope Celestine V. Beginning of the secession in the Order. (December) Celestine resigns, Boniface VIII elected.
1298 Siege of Palestrina. Imprisonment of Jacopone da Todi.
1300 Segarelli burned.
1303 Boniface insulted at Anagni.
1307 Dolcino captured and burned.
1312 Clement V issues constitution of "*Exivi de Paradiso.*"
1317 John XXII persecutes "Spirituals."
1318 "Speculum Perfectionis" first issued.
1321 Death of Dante.
1337 Death of Giotto and of Angelo Clareno.
1368 Paolo Trinci establishes a community at Brugliano.
1378 Election of Urban VIII. Great Schism begins.
1402 Bernardino of Siena enters Order. Observants greatly increase during his period.
1430 Martin V mediates between the two parties in Order.
1444 Death of St. Bernardino.
1517 Leo X divides Order.
1525 Beginning of the Capuchins.

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